

**LORD LIVERPOOL'S ADMINISTRATION,
1815-1822**

J. E. Cookson

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LORD LIVERPOOL'S ADMINISTRATION
1815 - 1822

Being a thesis presented by J.E. Cookson
to the University of St. Andrews in
application for the degree of Ph.D.

1969



Th 5713



Mr. John Cookson was enrolled as a research student under Ordinance 12 in the Faculty of Arts on 6 October 1965 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D. on 4 May 1966. From October 1965 to September 1968 he was a full time research student in the Faculty working in the field of Modern British History.

Norman Gash
(Supervisor)

DECLARATIONS

I hereby declare that the following Thesis is based on research carried out by me, that the Thesis is my own composition, and that it has not previously been presented for a Higher Degree.

The research was carried out in the University of St.Andrews and elsewhere after my admission as a research student and Ph.D. candidate in October 1965.

J.B. Cookson

I certify that the aforesaid candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Ordinance and Regulations prescribed for the degree of Ph.D.

Supervisor

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Preface

This work is an attempt to explain British politics from the government side in the half a dozen crucial years immediately after Waterloo. That these were crucial years no one will deny, but because the common view has it that their events are well enough known perhaps I should say a word or two in defence of the fullness of my treatment. The truth of the matter is that while scores of historians have traversed this ground hardly any have stooped to observe it minutely. To my knowledge the only comparable work is Dr. Austin Mitchell's recently published monograph on the Whig party, 1815-30, but its great disadvantage is that it is exclusively concerned with the opposition when what an opposition does is largely connected with what the government itself happens to be doing. There is a great need - I hope I may say was - to investigate in detail the workings of the government's mind in order to understand better just in what frame of reference the politicians were operating. How did they view public opinion? Where did they think political strength lay? Did they adjust their attitudes to keep pace with a changing society? It is all very well, for instance, to talk grandly about 'the rise of public opinion,' but until it can be shown that the men in office were actually responding in word and deed to pressures from outside the point can scarcely be satisfactorily established.

Hence my preference for a full-bodied narrative. Since governments live very much from day to day it was a form which obviously recommended itself. Where the topical approach finds it difficult to avoid giving history a static quality, the chronological is perfectly adapted to the ever-changing world of circumstance in which all politicians dwell. To see things as they saw them, in fact, must be my justification for giving issues of foreign policy and Catholic relief little or

no mention. Without doubt, disengagement from Europe and the breaching of the Anglican monopoly were two of the most momentous trends in early nineteenth century Great Britain, and yet up to about 1822 it is quite remarkable that the country, parliament and even the Cabinet remained largely uninterested. Each for different reasons remained outside politics. Europe having at long last composed its differences, Castlereagh was left to his own devices by a country traditionally isolationist; and the struggle for emancipation was neutralised by the government's refusal to take sides and the opposition's failure to come to terms with Irish opinion. In the final analysis this serves to emphasise that the real issue of the day was 'the condition of England.' And that condition in most cases related back to the eighteenth century bogey of ministerial corruption and extravagance: public opinion persisted in attributing all distresses to rapacious and unfeeling governors and increasingly to the system over which they presided, and as long as it did so the Whigs took up the refrain and the administration dared not pretend total deafness. It is around this one theme that the politics of the immediate post-war period have to be written, for not only did the demand for parsimonious government lead to substantial economical reform but inasmuch as extravagance was held to be the cause of all the nation's ills every issue had a common denominator. In this light the questions of Catholic relief and Britain's role in Europe assume even less importance because they were foreign rather than domestic. Before we decide what politics were about in any one period it is as well to consult the men of the time.

Regarding terminology I have taken the view that one cannot do better than borrow the expressions which were contemporary. Hence I use 'country gentlemen' and 'independents' - as synonymous terms (though not all independents were country

gentlemen and not all country gentlemen independents), and 'Catholics' and 'Protestants' and 'Radicals' (after 1819) and 'Whigs.' I have not referred to the ministerialists as 'Tories' because this was apparently rare. To impart a certain period flavour I have retained the original capitalisation, punctuation and spelling when quoting except where it would have grossly distorted the sense.

My list of acknowledgements is necessarily a long one. I wish to place on record my grateful thanks to the staff of the following institutions for their unfailing courtesy and attention: the University Library, St. Andrews; the British Museum; the Public Record Office; the Library, University College, University of London; the National Library of Wales; the National Library of Scotland; Cornwall Record Office; Devon Record Office; Gloucester Record Office; Durham Record Office; the Archives Department, Leeds Public Library. In addition, I should like to recognise the generosity of the following noble persons for allowing me access to papers in their possession: the Marquis of Normanby; the Earl of Harrowby; the Lady Mairi Bury.

I cannot conclude without expressing my particular indebtedness to two persons. My supervisor, Professor Norman Cosh, made his great knowledge of the period freely available and all along overseered me with patience and good humour; and my wife, Pamela, not only assisted with research but painstakingly typed the text. But for them a long journey would have been much less pleasant.

ABBREVIATIONS

Add. MSS.	Additional Manuscripts in the British Museum.
<u>Arbuthnot</u>	<u>The Correspondence of Charles Arbuthnot (ed. A. Aspinall).</u>
<u>Bathurst</u>	<u>Historical Manuscripts Commission, Report on the Manuscripts of Earl Bathurst.</u>
Bathurst MSS.	Papers of the third Earl Bathurst in the British Museum.
<u>Brougham</u>	<u>The Life and Times of Henry, Lord Brougham written by himself.</u>
Brougham MSS.	Papers of the first Baron Brougham and Vaux, University College, London.
Buckingham, <u>George IV</u>	Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, <u>Memoirs of the Court of George IV.</u>
Buckingham, <u>Regency</u>	Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, <u>Memoirs of the Court of England during the Regency.</u>
<u>Canning</u>	Augustus Granville Stapleton, <u>George Canning and his Times.</u>
Canning MSS.	Papers of George Canning, Central Library, Leeds.
<u>Castlereagh</u>	<u>Correspondence, Despatches and other Papers of Viscount Castlereagh (ed. Marquis of Londonderry).</u>
Castlereagh MSS.	Papers of the second Marquis of Londonderry, Mount Stewart, Co. Down, Northern Ireland.
<u>CJ</u>	Journals of the House of Commons.
Coed-y-maen MSS.	Papers of Charles Watkin Williams-Wynn included in the Coed-y-maen deposit, National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth.
<u>Colchester</u>	<u>The Diary and Correspondence of Charles Abbot, Lord Colchester (ed. Charles, Lord Colchester).</u>

<u>Creavey</u>	<u>The Creavey Papers</u> (ed. Sir Herbert Maxwell).
<u>Croker</u>	<u>The Correspondence and Diaries of John Wilson Croker</u> (ed. Louis J. Jennings).
<u>Eldon</u>	Horace Twiss, <u>The Life of Lord Chancellor Eldon.</u>
<u>Fortescue</u>	Historical Manuscripts Commission, <u>Report on the Manuscripts of J.E. Fortescue.</u>
<u>George IV</u>	<u>The Letters of George IV, 1812-1830</u> (ed. A. Aspinall).
Grenville MSS.	Papers of the first Baron Grenville, Cornwall Record Office, Truro.
<u>Hansard</u>	<u>The Parliamentary Debates</u> published by Hansard.
Harrowby MSS.	Papers of the first Earl of Harrowby, Sandon Hall, Staffs.
Herries MSS.	Papers of John Charles Herries in the British Museum.
HO	Home Office Papers in the Public Record Office.
<u>Hobhouse</u>	<u>The Diary of Henry Hobhouse</u> (ed. A. Aspinall).
<u>Liverpool</u>	Charles Duke Yonge, <u>The Life and Administration of Robert Banks, Second Earl of Liverpool.</u>
<u>LJ</u>	<u>Journals of the House of Lords.</u>
Londonderry MSS.	Papers of the third Marquis of Londonderry, County Record Office, Durham.
<u>Mrs. Arbuthnot</u>	<u>The Journal of Mrs. Arbuthnot</u> (ed. Francis Bamford and the Duke of Wellington).
NLS MSS.	National Library of Scotland Manuscripts.
<u>Peel</u>	<u>Sir Robert Peel</u> (ed. Charles Stuart Parker).

<u>Plumer Ward</u>	Hon. Edmund Phipps, <u>Memoirs of the Political and Literary Life of Robert Plumer Ward.</u>
<u>PP</u>	Parliamentary Papers, House of Commons.
<u>PRO</u>	Public Record Office.
<u>Sidmouth</u>	George Pellew, <u>The Life and Correspondence of First Viscount Sidmouth.</u>
Sidmouth MSS.	Papers of the first Viscount Sidmouth, Devon Record Office, Exeter.
<u>Wellington Desp.</u>	<u>The Despatches of Field Marshal the Duke of Wellington</u> (ed. Lt. Col. Gurwood).
<u>Wellington Desp.</u> (new series)	<u>Despatches, Correspondence and Memoranda of the Duke of Wellington</u> (ed. Duke of Wellington).
<u>Wellington Sup. Desp.</u>	<u>Supplementary Despatches and Memoranda of the Duke of Wellington</u> (ed. Duke of Wellington).
<u>Wilberforce</u>	Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, <u>The Life of William Wilberforce.</u>
<u>WO</u>	War Office Papers in the Public Record Office.

INTRODUCTION

Like many a patriarch of Adam's seed the administration of the second Earl of Liverpool is most readily called to mind by the sheer fact of its longevity, as if to exist is a great achievement and all others of lesser importance. Perhaps, so far as politics are concerned at least, this is quite the right instinct. To survive fifteen years less a month or two is no trifling performance for any government. To survive fifteen years at a time of profound social change when many historians think the country came near to revolution is little short of marvellous. It is true to say that Liverpool's experience as premier bore a remarkable resemblance to Pitt's; both began their tenure of power in unpropitious circumstances, both fought a war and settled a peace and both grappled in a death struggle with forces which threatened all that they held dear in the social and political order. But despite the sameness it may be that Pitt was much better placed than his protegee to translate weakness into strength. For a start he had the active support of a politically-minded king, a diminishing but by no means exhausted power of patronage, and sufficient talent - himself included - in the Commons where it mattered. By comparison Liverpool had to make do with a front bench of mediocrities - Castlereagh alone excepted, an influence almost reduced to a mere nothing, and a Prince Regent more of a nuisance than anything else. Worse still, he came to power at a time when political loyalties were unusually atomised. After five administrations in eleven years - a bewildering entree and exit of Addingtonians, Grenvilles, Pittites, Foxites and Canningites - the temperature in the political hothouse had risen an alarming degree and every politician by habit betrayed an excessive regard for his own

honour and the public estimation. Though the Grenvilles and Whigs, partners in the Talents coalition, stuck together on the strength of their dismissal upon the Catholic question, for the rest the struggle for office was more meaningfully interpreted as between men rather than measures. On the need to prosecute the war with vigour and resolution all politicians claiming Pitt's mantle were in perfect agreement; and concerning Catholic relief they like everyone else knew that an exclusively Protestant administration was a notion too unfeasible to be worth even momentary consideration. But Sidmouth found it hard to forgive Canning his scathing attacks, Canning refused to be designated Castlereagh's equal or inferior, and Liverpool would have none of Wellesley's claims for the premiership after his bare-faced desertion in January 1812. Where Pitt with the American War at an end was able to compound a government out of Shelburne and North's followers in a matter of months, his protege laboured ten years to build an equivalent broad bottom such was the degree of estrangement. In this light alone the longevity of the administration is deservedly memorable.

Liverpool, it must be said, was aware from the start of the basic weakness of his position. Writing to Wellington two months after taking office, he confessed that in the Commons the government would depend on "the most promising of the young men," and mindful perhaps of the parallel he wished aloud for "a second Pitt" to arise from amongst these novices.¹ To be sure, it was talent not numbers that was immediately lacking. With Canning and Wellesley refusing to join the remnants of Perceval's administration, with Liverpool refusing to serve under Wellesley and Grenville and Grey under anyone, the country could take it for granted that for the moment no

1 Wellington Sup. Desp., vii. 402.

stronger combination was possible however desirable; and more than anything this realisation gave the government a handsome win at the election called to emulate Pitt's feat and still better results when the new House of Commons came into being in November 1812. The difficulty was that to keep this support the Treasury Bench had to appear worthy of it. Of course, Liverpool and his fellow ministers knew only too well that much depended on how Wellington fared with his small British army now deep in Spain, for if confidence had been given them to carry on the King's service, meaning especially the war, a run of defeats would soon see it withdrawn probably amid a welter of anti-war feeling. To this extent the government's future was beyond the control of ministers, at least where the supply lines ended, and to this extent Wellington with his sequence of brilliant success was its indubitable saviour. But apart from good luck good management was also needed. In the House of Commons, which in time of war more than ever left the Lords in the shade, an administration had to speak as much as vote itself out of trouble, and here Lord Liverpool found his resources woefully inadequate. On the front bench there was only Castlereagh, Vansittart and Bragge Bathurst of the cabinet; the first could perhaps hold his own on what he called "field-days," though alongside Whitbread, Romilly and Tierney he was at best a clumsy orator, but the second was even confusing on his own speciality of finance and the last barely articulate. Against the imposing line-up on the opposition side the impression was bound to go abroad of weaklings holding power, and to lose grace with the country was the first step towards losing grace with parliament itself.

In his first years as Prime Minister Liverpool never came near to solving this problem, which made the war's happy turn all the more important. To be sure, the young men on

whom he relied slowly learnt their trade until Castlereagh never ceased boasting that each department had "persons able to repel any assailant on the details of the particular office."¹ But always there existed a deplorable lack of heavy artillery, so much so that in November 1814 Liverpool was beseeching Castlereagh to hurry home from Vienna to bring the Commons to some kind of order.² Canning, who was probably first among the "eloquents," was the obvious man to entice, not least because he represented the constant threat of a third party or "flying squadron," but both attempts to win him over failed abysmally. The first in July 1812, soon after Liverpool's makeshift administration had introduced itself to parliament, collapsed when Canning in an evil hour insisted that Castlereagh must be his subordinate or equal, never his superior. The less-known second made sometime in 1813 depended on Melville leaving the Admiralty,³ and when for some reason this broke down Liverpool magnanimously arranged Canning's withdrawal to the embassy at Lisbon where he remained for two reflective years. In truth though, there was more to the Prime Minister's magnanimity than met the eye. With Canning abroad and Wellesley cold-shouldered by government and opposition alike, trouble on the administration's flank was unlikely for the moment; and with a firm promise to Canning that the next Cabinet vacancy would be his if he wanted it there was a fair chance that it would be dissipated altogether. The government's bottom had still to be broadened, the front bench in the Commons was still a sorry sight, but at least those who might have been against

1 Croker, i. 231.

2 Castlereagh, x. 239.

3 See the reference in Lord Liverpool to Canning, 13 February 1816, Canning MSS.

were rendered relatively innocuous.

Of course, in the beginning it probably seemed that the government was vulnerable from within quite as much as otherwise. While it was true that Liverpool was the unanimous choice of his colleagues and that the Cabinet looked much like a continuation of Perceval's, after years of chronic instability slender threads indeed held the ministry together. Fortunately, on the prime matter of how to win the war the ministers were heartily in agreement; Wellington was supported to the full in the Peninsula, Castlereagh set about remaking the Grand Coalition, and out of success came the beginnings of real solidarity. Fortunately too, there were no domestic questions outstanding or none to cause serious concern: Ireland was quiet so that opposition efforts to stir the Catholic question became nothing more than attempts to test the government's professed neutrality; in the Midlands and Yorkshire the Luddites were capitulating before the brute force of 12,000 regulars; the session of 1811 had settled the vexatious question of a return to gold while the war lasted; and the much-hated Orders-in-Council which had driven the mercantile world frantic were revoked a fortnight after Liverpool formed his administration. Such luck certainly helped the government find its feet. Even so, perhaps some saw that the nearer Great Britain came to winning the war the nearer came insuperable problems of peace. After the American War there had been a period albeit brief of economic dislocation and panic about the enormity of the war debt, and contemporaries began to ask themselves how much greater the pangs of recovery would be following two decades of herculean effort. Indeed, that these were not idle fears seemed confirmed when the price of corn suffered a sudden slump towards the end of 1813 resulting in protectionist cries from the landed interest, street demonstrations in the metropolis and

knowing nods from the economic wiseheads that the war had given agriculture an artificial prosperity and the farmer would now have to pay for it. Even more depressing, by 1815 trade and industry seemed to be heading in much the same direction; where the farmer was in trouble for over-producing and over-capitalising, the merchant was also over-extending himself by pouring goods into Europe for which there was no certain demand, and between them the whole nation was threatened with recession and all its concomitant evils. In the midst of final victory, therefore, the government could find few crumbs of comfort in the situation at home. Even the corn law of 1815, passed to quieten an indignant squirearchy, proved inadequate to stop the rot, for the price of wheat and other staples continued to fall regardless. Liverpool and his colleagues had survived the war by winning it. Whether they were going to survive the peace would depend more on themselves than the gods.

In the circumstances what the government could do was limited by both its prejudices or habits of mind and its resources. As far as the economy was concerned, the all-pervading belief was that fundamental laws operated which any government was powerless to resist, and to this way of thinking the sole purpose of interference was to alleviate or encourage their inexorable working. Significantly, perhaps the most oft-quoted lines in parliament were a couplet from Goldsmith which ran;

How small, of all that human hearts endure,
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure.

Of course, such doctrine owed much to Adam Smith and the contemporary teaching of political economy; but it also happened to coincide with a long-cherished notion that a government should do little outside the conventional spheres of war, diplomacy, justice, order and finance, and even then activity

was kept to a minimum by the use of the local authorities or ad hoc commissions to deal with problems out of the ordinary. It was this administrative torpor which explained to a large extent the government's effete-ness, for over the years the instruments of government had been shaped accordingly. In 1797, for example, about fourteen-fifteenths of a civil service establishment of 16,000 was devoted to raising the public revenue or supervising its expenditure while between them the three secretaryships and the Board of Trade employed eighty-one persons.¹ Seen in this light, the effects of economical reform cannot be over-stated. Once cheap government became a national obsession, it became a rule of thumb for all administrations that efficiency was to come second to cheapness whenever the two were irreconcilable, and to the habit of doing nothing was added the inability to do anything. The returns from the public offices speak for themselves: the Treasury despite a national expenditure tripled since before the war had an establishment in 1821 five larger than in 1797; the Board of Trade with imports and exports nearly doubling gained one additional clerk in the same period; and the Home Office even by the time Peel took over found an increase of four still "insufficient to carry on the current business."² The inevitable result was that the administrative machine worked harder than it ever did and perforce was vastly more efficient. But against the needs of a rapidly changing society it was making no way at all and on the eve of peace the great question was whether a respite would be gained and if so whether the ministers would steer to take its advantage. On the whole the chances were surely against both. On the one hand, a period of frustration and hardship seemed unavoidable and whenever the country was in a

1 PP, 1828, xvi. 531-3.

2 Ibid., 1833, xlii. 455-9.

slough of despond a cry for economy, cramping all administrative initiative, was an habitual call of distress. On the other, an entire generation of statesmen had been bred to the exigencies of war, and a mentality geared to the short-term possibilities of a military situation was not easily trained to take a larger view nor to give mundane matters of domestic policy a prominence of their own. Perhaps the future stared the government straight in the face. It was not the ministers who were going to change the country; it was the country which was going to change the ministers.

In the political world the growing influence of public opinion, meaning public opinion in its widest sense, was by no means taken for granted. Though contemporaries spoke a great deal about the advancement or diffusion of knowledge, men in Liverpool's position saw nothing beyond the moral and social betterment of the lower classes, and the old Burkean notion of the people protesting and politicians prescribing seemed as applicable in 1815 as it had been in 1770. Instead, if anything, the events of the previous quarter century only rendered this part of the constitutional order more precious than ever, for to the British governing class the course of the Revolution and the revolutionary wars was a commentary worthy of Polybius on the inevitable descent from democracy to bloody anarchy and from anarchy to tyranny. Among the privileged only the Whigs were coming to have second thoughts. But where the Whigs, spurned by the Crown and themselves spurning office until they could dominate, counted on parliament succumbing to public pressure, their adversaries could never have fought them on equal terms had they been able to forget their aristocratic prepossessions. A government-dominated press had always been out of the question because proprietors had discovered that an independent line was a far more saleable commodity than mere

propaganda, and it followed as a matter of course that the greater the government's unpopularity the smaller its public voice. Nor were public meetings any better vehicle; long before in the large towns the mass meeting had come into its own, and more depressing still, even the county assemblages were fast shaking off the traditional dominance of nobility, gentry and clergy. Little wonder, therefore, that to Liverpool and his colleagues the only opinion which mattered was the opinion of the upper and "middling" classes, and that all else parliament in its deliberative capacity could properly ignore as ill-informed "clamour."

Unfortunately for them, in the changing society of the early nineteenth century this was merely playing the ostrich. Sooner or later they or whoever succeeded them would have to come to terms with the new Britain, the Britain of the Industrial Revolution; with a proletariat able and willing to speak on the issues of the moment, with a ruling class prepared to compromise to exist, and with a parliament representative enough to respond despite an ancient electoral system. Well before 1815 even, the indications were that the House of Commons was becoming less and less amenable to ministerial control and therefore by definition more and more prone to outside pressures. In the age of North an agitation like that against the Orders-in-Council in 1812 and the property tax in 1815 would have been totally inconceivable, not least because people of all conditions petitioned and the government retreated rather than hazard a parliamentary contest. The fact was that after years of hacking at the royal influence the party of the Crown had virtually ceased to exist, and left with fifty or sixty "efficient" placemen who would leave office when they did the ministers had no formal control over the independents who made up the bulk of their majorities. Thus, somehow or other, any Cabinet had to

learn to live with the occasional perverseness of its supporters, but the particular danger confronting Liverpool's was lest a prolonged period of public disenchantment would see incidental become habitual opposition. Perhaps this brought everything back to the failure to secure a broad-bottomed administration in 1812. Above all, the country gentlemen wanted strong government, and a government of talent to which there was demonstrably no alternative but the execrable Whigs had a much better chance of surviving the uncomprehending clamour of public opinion. To Liverpool no doubt the need to get Canning was a desire to escape the nuisance and danger of an "intermediate" party; but at the same time the instinct was far from being amiss. Talent more than ever was a precious political commodity. The question was whether strong government would be enough by itself. Would measures as well as men be required to assuage the people's wrath?

PEACE AND PARSIMONY

For most Britons Waterloo demonstrated much: it exhibited the Duke of Wellington, so none could deny it, as the greatest captain of the age; it fulfilled Great Britain's destiny, as the most unremitting of Napoleon's enemies, to be the instrument of his final overthrow; and it showed "the firmness, and nerve, and independence of the British soldier, the stamina of his courage ... which renders our armies invincible, and without which even the transcendent abilities of the Duke of WELLINGTON could not have saved the day"¹ Thinking men perhaps reflected that never before had intervention in Europe been so successful. In the past, time and time again British armies had battered in vain against the fortress barrier which protected the frontiers of France, and it would have taken a brave man indeed to venture the prophecy that within three weeks of the first encounter Paris would open her gates to the Allies. The ministers had even more cogent reasons for celebrating. They knew what no one else could fully appreciate, that if Waterloo had not been the victory it was the country would have been hard pressed to foot the bill for another year of war.² Money borrowed for either the short or long term had been the provender which had fed the war machine for a generation; increasing sums of borrowed money had been used to finance the grand climax of the struggle against Napoleon. Now the supply seemed close to running out. With a great coalition to subsidise and an advancing army in

1 The Times, 24 June 1815.

2 See the Chancellor of the Exchequer's comment in Castlereagh, xi.5.

Spain to support, the government after 1812 had floated loans amounting to over a third more than those of any other three years of the war.¹ Peace, in fact, had not come a moment too soon. Credit had become tighter and tighter after 1813, and when Napoleon's return to France forced the government onto the money market again a depression was in full swing: farmers struggled to make ends meet with falling prices; the country banks, anticipating trouble, contracted their note issues and began to foreclose on mortgages and other advances; and what with the speculative overloading of the Continental market the mercantile world was in equally dire straits. Under the inordinate pressure of war therefore, the government did what in any other situation it would never have contemplated; it asked for money when the country at large was crying out for the same. More than likely, although contemporary political economy did not properly understand it, the necessity did less harm than good, for increased government spending would have helped invigorate the economy to some extent and even subsidies to foreign powers could have encouraged the export drive by providing customers with the means to buy. But any war boom was too short-lived to arrest the general movement towards depression.

With the country in such poor economic shape the ministers must surely have admired the policy as much as the military finesse of Wellington and Blücher's swift advance towards Paris. As they saw it, money in short supply was the present evil, and the best way to tackle it was for the government to quit borrowing which it could only do by cutting back its expenditure - meaning in effect that the shorter the war the sooner Great Britain could stop living beyond her means.

1 £183,000,000 1809-11 and nearly £275,000,000 1812-14. Norman J. Silberling, "Financial and Monetary Policy of Great Britain during the Napoleonic Wars," Quarterly Journal of Economics, xxxviii (1924). 215.

Once victory was assured overseas spending by the army and in support of allies was where drastic economies might obviously begin, such outlay not only aggravating the credit situation at home but also depressing the exchanges by keeping foreign currencies in high demand. It was thus that the subsidies to friendly powers, many of them still being contracted after Waterloo, became the government's immediate concern. If paid in full they would cost Great Britain over £11,000,000.¹ Most of the treaties engaged her to pay either until 1 April 1816 or, if peace was signed before then, until the armies had disbanded themselves, so that notwithstanding victory in June she was still paying money out at the end of the year. In this respect Castlereagh felt that Great Britain had no right to be stingy, making the point that as long as the other Great Powers kept more men in the field than was required of them by the Treaty of Vienna and she kept less, the subsidies were one way in which she could make an equal contribution. Naturally, the finance ministers could not see eye to eye with him at all; with the war over they saw no need to subsidise armies to march into France and back again, and in response to their remonstrances the Danish corps and the Russian army in reserve were actually halted in Germany and the Spanish army sent back across the Pyrenees. In the end though, the saving must have been trivial. The Danes lingered nearly two months at Bremen - even if they had gone straight home their share of Great Britain's largesse would not have been much less than it was - and the Russians only decamped after they had been promised over £400,000 to meet their expenses. Still, the government

1 Castlereagh, xi. 107-8; Wellington Sup.Desp., xi. 153.

had done its best.¹

When dealing with its own, it could expect more attention to its wishes. As usually happens, peace was declared long after the fighting had stopped. For over four months the British army, like the others, stood easy while the diplomats at Paris talked themselves into agreement, and in the meantime the Treasury had to grin and bear the delay as it totted up the enormous cost; in July it was over £400,000.² Really annoying were reports that the British quartermasters were paying their way, as they had done when they last entered France in 1814. Then the quarrel had been with a man, but now it was with a people, and the government quickly reminded Wellington, needlessly as it turned out, that he should live upon the country like any other conqueror.³ Once the requisitioning machinery was working properly Great Britain found that her monthly expenses were cut by over a third.⁴

A strong motive for economies in overseas spending was the relief it offered to the pound which could not hope to escape pressure as long as foreign money was or was expected to be in great demand. Whenever sterling suffered, usually the country's bullion reserves did as well, because the exchange rate for metal was always steadier than that for paper; and perhaps even more to the point, as long as the exchanges remained below par Great Britain would pay through the nose in using her money to buy foreign goods and foreign services. There were, then, sound reasons for assisting the pound as much as possible. In the past British commissaries abroad had

1 Castlereagh, i. 418, 473-4, 477-8, 481-2, xi. 1-3, 44. The accounts placed before parliament show that £10,054,730 was paid out in subsidies and other forms of money aid. PP. 1816, xi. 215-16.

2 Castlereagh, i. 482.

3 Wellington Sup. Desp., xi. 23-4, 28; Wellington Desp., xi. 557.

4 Castlereagh, xi. 3.

mostly paid their way by drawing bills of exchange on London, but towards the end of the war the government began to raise money on the Continent and used that to finance its foreign concerns. With sterling still weak throughout 1815 it stuck to the same policy; foreign bills and specie were bought in Germany and the Netherlands, foreign coin for the military chest was minted from bullion held at home, long-term bills of exchange payable in foreign currency were negotiated, and a clause was written into the new subsidy treaties allowing the powers concerned to draw upon funds in Europe instead of London.¹ Under this protection the exchange rate of the pound continued to improve after its slight setback following Napoleon's sudden return, notwithstanding that at least £12,000,000 was remitted abroad in the course of the year.² Keeping roughly in step with the exchanges the Bank of England's bullion reserves also recovered so that by New Year they were the highest they had been since 1809, cheering news when it was everywhere assumed that the Bank would soon resume cash payments. Of course much of the success was not the government's work; deflation at home had given the exchanges strong assistance, and the Bank was purposely replenishing its stocks of bullion in preparation for a return to the gold standard. But at least the government had helped and not hindered. To its way of thinking the money-raising on the Continent was eminently sensible finance, allowing it to let the London market well alone at a time when credit was disconcertingly short; and it followed that policy with a laudable conscientiousness. Probably the unconventionality of the operation is worth admiring as well; according to Herries, who as Commissary-in-Chief was largely responsible for

1 Edward Herries, Memoir of John Charles Herries, i. 240-7.

2 Silberling, p.227 says £11,900,000, but this figure only includes money remitted to foreign powers and the British army in Europe.

organising it, the bills payable in foreign currency represented the "first successful attempt to raise money on British credit on the Continent for the public service."¹

As far as the depression itself went the government never thought there was much it could do except keep clear of the loan market and hope that credit never asked for would be applied usefully somewhere else. Admittedly, on four occasions after 1793 Exchequer bills had been issued as a form of loan to help merchants, manufacturers, and in one instance, West Indian planters through difficult periods, but this time the government preferred to redeem outstanding bills rather than issue more. That it could afford it needed no explanation because a tidy sum remained out of the supplies voted by parliament on the outbreak of war. And it was a "safe and unexceptionable" interference into the bargain; there was no superintending commission to appoint, the ministers would not be bothered by squabbles about who or what should be assisted, and a generous redemption of bills - the government depended on them for its ready cash - might be expected to thaw a channel of supply which was already frozen solid. This way too, good turns were done all round. The government gladly reimbursed the Bank, the largest holder of Exchequer bills, in the expectation that it would return the favour by increasing its private advances as relief to a country starved of credit; and the Bank, always wary of over-extending itself, was grateful to be repaid, for its advances both public and private had only once before been as high as they were in the second quarter of 1815.² Usually reliable in crises of this sort, the directors did not let the government down. For the quarter ended 30 June they had,

1 Herries, i. 246.

2 Castlereagh, xi. 6, 24. For a table showing the index number of the Bank's advances 1793-1822 see E. Victor Morgan, "Some Aspects of the Bank Restriction Period, 1797-1821," Economic History, iv (1939). 206.

on average, £13,846,000 in bills and notes under discount: for that following the amount was nearly £3,000,000 more.¹

There was nothing very daring about the government's tinkering with the economy, but solid and unoriginal finance did bring results, and no doubt the ministers congratulated themselves on their good work as the exchanges kept improving, bullion returned and the Bank had money to put to good use. However, the achievement by itself was not enough to set their minds at rest. Everything in the last resort depended on what happened at Paris - whether agreement was reached, and if it was, whether the peace was likely to last. No one knew better than the Cabinet did that another armed truce, which looking back was all 1802 and 1814 had been, was a state of affairs which the country would not stomach and certainly could not afford. A breathing spell was essential. (In one dispatch Castlereagh mentioned seven years.² Indeed, Lord Liverpool wondered how the interest of the debt would be paid if the peacemakers failed or if another war had to be fought in the very near future.³

The Cabinet made sure that Castlereagh saw things as they did. There was no need to instruct him to keep the nation's security in mind. Maybe, for he did not care much for the money side of government, there was reason to remind him that Great Britain was neither able nor willing to pay a fortune to obtain it. From the beginning some kind of indemnity was insisted on, and once the Great Powers began to think that an army of occupation and counter-fortifications opposing the French frontier were further precautions worth taking, Castlereagh was sent strict instructions that France

1 Report on the Bank of England Charter, Appendix, p.53, PP, 1831-2, vi. 543.

2 Wellington Sup. Desp., xi. 138.

3 Castlereagh, x. 476-7.

should be made to pay for both.¹ The government even went so far as to forbid France to borrow her way out of difficulties with British money. Vansittart pounced smartly when he learnt that the French government had the City's ear; Barings were told that a loan raised in London was out of the question, and Castlereagh was quickly briefed with arguments against it in case the French approached him instead.² The ministers meant business. To them it was high time that Europe stopped being served with British treasure.

The treaties, signed and sealed on 20 November bore out Vansittart's contention that his country was "not making war for conquests, and much less for money."³ No more colonies were taken from France, and part of Great Britain's share of the war indemnity - 100,000,000 francs - was given to the Dutch to help them fortify their frontier and reduce the chance of another French irruption into the Low Countries. At the same time, the government only gave away what it could comfortably afford. To be sure, the 30,000-strong contingent of the occupying army was not wholly supported by what France was ordered to pay for its upkeep, but the difference was scarcely worth grumbling about. If the troops had been brought home and disbanded there would have been a charge for their half pay and pensions, and this saving alone brought the actual cost down to £195,000 a year. In addition, however, with such a large army just over the Channel, the government felt it was safe to lower the home establishment by 5,000, which saved well over £100,000 more.⁴

1 Liverpool, ii. 195, 211.

2 Castlereagh, xi. 22-3.

3 Ibid., p.24.

4 Wellington Sup. Desp., xi. 205; undated memorandum, Castlereagh Mss, xix. 352. According to "An Account of the Sums received from France, in respect of the Pecuniary Indemnity," PP, 1823, xiv. 125, £1,269,071 was paid to the army in France "beyond the Sum received from the French Government," about £400,000 a year.

The happy event at Paris signalled that it was time for the army and navy to reduce themselves, though of course this could not be done in a moment. When parliament next came together the government was to remind everyone repeatedly that the country was in an intermediate state between peace and war, and because it took time to work out troop movements on a global scale and more time to ship regiments where they were wanted, the statement was not unpalatable. India, for example, the most remote station except New South Wales, was six month's sailing away for most vessels, but taking account of weeks spent at the Cape resting the men, twice as long for a troop transport. About October the Duke of York, who was Commander-in-Chief, began to ponder the army's commitments. Without question they made disturbing reading; Ireland had to be reinforced with regulars seeing that the militia could not be kept on duty there indefinitely, 30,000 men had to be left in France, many of the colonial garrisons were in dire need of men through sickness and long neglect, and not a soldier could be withdrawn from India while the Gurkhas remained in arms and when a showdown with the Marathas was imminent.¹ The most unpleasant fact was that once the militia had been disbanded the effective strength of the army was going to be less than the number of a suitable peace establishment. Indeed, there was a great danger that it would fall far below if the discharge of invalids and short-service men, and reductions generally, were not countered by some vigorous recruiting;² and recruits would not be easy to come by, for soldiering in peacetime had little to recommend it. Worse still, there were no Germans for hire, as the princes had their own contingents to raise for service in France.³ Unless, therefore, the army managed to scoop

1 Wellington, Sup. Desp., xi. 204-5.

2 Memorandum by the Duke of York, 3 November 1815, Add. MSS. 48427, ff. 117-31.

3 Wellington Desp., xii. 662, 669.

large numbers of militiamen into its net at the last minute, its embarrassment was almost certain.¹

A tussle between the politicians and the generals over establishments was perhaps inevitable. The Cabinet, anticipating a rumpus in parliament if their pruning fell short of expectations, wanted to protect themselves by economising to the utmost;² while the Commander-in-Chief for his part, was just as determined to check this incorrigible political instinct. Of course, all wanted an army equal to its responsibilities, but the Horse Guards could not forget the shambles in 1793 when the nation, finding itself unprepared for war, had embarked on the "fatal System" and false economy of trying one expedient after another to raise the men it needed. On no account would the Duke of York see it happen again, and understandably so; his life's work had been the army's greater efficiency and he saw no sense in letting all be undone simply to ape the disastrous policy of wholesale reduction which followed the American War. There were sound political arguments anyway against going wild with the economist's axe. After the long contest with France the army was at the peak of condition, not lacking admirers on the Continent either; and seeing that for the first time in years Great Britain was not written off as a military power, the government had a handy political asset which it was madness to squander lightly. Besides, the Duke continued, economy and efficiency were reconcilable. That the army could be so run was what he had been trying to prove throughout the war, and peace, he assured the ministers, would not be taken as the excuse to lapse into the bad habits of the past.³ In reply the government said little. Indeed, there

1 Bathurst, p.392.

2 Wellington Sup. Desp., xi. 205.

3 Memorandum by the Duke of York, 3 November 1815, Add. MSS. 48427, ff. 117-31. This paper referred to another memorandum dated 17 May 1814 where the argument was explored in more detail. See Sidmouth MSS.

was little to say, apart from a reminder that the country had to be given an opportunity to recover from the tremendous exertions of the past two decades. Otherwise a huge army would be kept up for no purpose, for when war next eventuated the means to wage it would be soon exhausted.¹

The dialogue itself began on a note of sweet reasonableness. In his first memorandum on the subject of establishments the Duke of York agreed to lop 5,000 off the force to be kept at home while a British army was near at hand in France, and to garrison the empire with 800 fewer than he had wanted in 1814, even though since then the Ionian Islands had become a new responsibility engaging about 3,000 more troops.² Here the ministers found nothing to quarrel about; or if they did they gave no sign of it, inasmuch as Sir Henry Torrens, the military secretary at the Horse Guards, was under the impression that "some trivial details" were the only bother.³ A fortnight later, however, things had changed completely: the mood of the Cabinet had hardened perceptibly, the Commander-in-Chief's number was no longer acceptable, and Torrens was warning his chief that whatever he shrank from would be done notwithstanding.⁴ It was only now that the ministers apprehended that reduction was a work of months not weeks. The December returns made it quite plain that before a single regiment had been struck off the list the number of effectives did not equal the establishment which the Duke of York had in mind,⁵ and obviously, in

1 Bathurst, p.399.

2 Memorandum, 3 November 1815, Add. MSS. 48427, ff. 117-31.

3 Sir Henry Torrens to Lord Palmerston, 16 December 1815, W.O.3/610.

4 Sir Henry Torrens to the Duke of York, 30 December 1815, *ibid.*

5 On 25 December 1815 the effective strength of the regular army was 150,591. PP, 1816, xii.419. The Duke of York asked for an establishment of 152,500. Memorandum, 30 December 1815, Add. MSS. 48427, ff. 141-61.

these circumstances, care had to be taken not to let reduction outpace recruitment which was bound to be slow so soon after the war and which the law itself hindered by prohibiting drafts from regiment to regiment. Once it was safe to disband, moreover, a further year could elapse, for some troops would have to be brought home from the remotest stations and others sent out - alone no mean problem involving the navy as much as the army. When pressed by demands out of the ordinary, an administration barely able to handle the routine had to do what it could in its own good time.

The ministers, then, had to face up to the unpleasant truth that in the current year the army was going to be more expensive than they had bargained on, and, not surprisingly, they began a thorough search for possible economies. Probably they had already resolved to keep the total establishment below 150,000, come what may, and when this mark was overstepped by making the force in France wholly British, it became impossible to shirk a revision any longer.¹ Once at work they did not stop at half measures: Canada and the Cape lost 1,000 men apiece; the West Indies 1,500; and Ireland, despite the very real fears for her future peace and quiet, 5,000. Only one increase was permitted. With the army abroad crying out for reinforcements, and in many cases in urgent need of relief, allowance had to be made for an exceptionally heavy traffic to and from imperial outposts throughout the year. On second thoughts, 8,000, instead of 5,000, were set aside in preparation, though it was by no means a generous provision, this number being merely 1,000 more than what the Commander-in-Chief calculated would ordinarily be required.² Still, this meanness did

1 3,000 had to be added to the French establishment. Cf. memoranda, 3 November, 30 December 1815, *ibid.*, ff.117-31, 141-61.

2 Memorandum, 18 February 1816, *ibid.*, 38366, ff. 153-8.

enable the ministers to fix the establishment at 147,000, which was roughly the number they had been aiming for.¹ Only the Duke of York remained dissatisfied. As late as February, when discussion of the estimates was in full swing in the House of Commons, he was grumbling that insufficient allowance had been made for a proportion of sick and wounded, and that the army at home could have done with 5,000 more men than it had been allocated.² But as his own secretary had warned him, the government insisted on having the last say.

The Admiralty was never handled half so roughly. The First Lord, unlike the Commander-in-Chief, held Cabinet rank, so that the navy always knew the government's views at first hand; and because politicians sat alongside professionals on the Board, the issue could be fought out there without any need for outside interference. Fortunately a politician was in charge in 1815, one moreover who could be depended on not to try anything behind his colleagues' backs, and the government was able to rest assured that the job would be done with a sufficient ruthlessness. Even if Lord Melville's loyalty had been questionable there would have been less need to check his work, for parliament always had a soft spot for the navy and the rest of the country felt the same. As the so-called bulwark of the nation nobody was ready to grudge it a special attention, and it more or less got away scot-free while the army was the whipping boy on which any passion for economy spent itself. Nor were naval reductions as irrevocable as the army's. A regiment was disbanded for good, but ships which were not wanted for the moment were laid up with skeleton crews aboard, and provided they were kept in good repair they could be made ready for sea again at fairly short notice. The government

1 Memorandum submitted to the Prince Regent, 18 January 1816, *ibid.*, 48427, ff. 162-4.

2 Memorandum, 18 February 1816, *ibid.*, 38366, ff. 153-8.

knew, then, that if the Admiralty did make the mistake of mothballing too many ships, it was no great bother to correct it.

The navy completed its post-war stocktaking in December, a full month before the army was finally made to toe the line. Forty-four first to fifth-rate ships, which included everything from three-deckers to 36-gun frigates, were to be left in commission and two hundred and sixteen to be laid up, neither figure, of course, taking into account a vast flotilla of smaller craft - sloops, corvettes, bomb ketches and the like.¹ As for the establishment necessary to maintain this fleet, that had to be tailored according to the time it was going to take for ships to be called home and paid off. For the first year of peace the Admiralty intended to ask parliament to vote 33,000 seamen and marines. Thereafter it was hoped that 23,000 would be ample.² Nor was the exaggeration in numbers more than adequate. By the end of March there were still twice as many ships in commission as the peace establishment allowed for.³

The cost of the army and navy, unavoidably enormous, posed a budgetary problem of no mean difficulty, a problem indeed which was going to plague the administration for the rest of its days. The root of the trouble lay in the income of the consolidated fund being almost wholly devoted to servicing the debt - that is, to paying the interest and the Bank of England its management fee. Well over £30,000,000 was needed to meet this charge, £29,000,000 for the remaining expenditure;⁴ and when a small surplus was all that the permanent taxes could provide, to make ends meet a huge sum had to be commanded from

1 J.W. Croker, Secretary of the Admiralty to the Navy Board, 8 December 1815, NLS MSS. 1044, ff. 158-63.

2 Hansard, 1st ser., xcxi. 384.

3 On 25 March 1816 there were 101 first to fifth-rates in commission and 138 others. CJ, lxxi. 672.

4 See the Chancellor of the Exchequer's "budget speech", 12 February 1816. Hansard, 1st ser., xcxi. 376-89.

somewhere. Usually there were three possibilities worth exploring, though this time, one way and another, the government felt diffident about each of them. The first of these was to raid the sinking fund. By 1815 the fund had been in operation for almost thirty years, and having been designed to accumulate money on the compound interest principle, a hard-pressed Chancellor of the Exchequer was bound to be tempted to help himself to its treasure.¹ Neither could the law, as it stood, stop him, for a clause in the original act expressly allowed the commissioners in charge to lend to the state. But no finance minister had ever plundered the fund, though it was true that once or twice a little money had been inveigled by some devious accountancy. Every government was anxious to have an ever-increasing sinking fund to show off simply because it advertised the state's determination to pay back what it had borrowed, thereby encouraging people to lend more when more was wanted - on conveniently favourable terms, it must be added. Throughout the war the fund was especially useful in this way and at the same time the belief in its intrinsic merit went from strength to strength. No one, or very few, worried about the absurdity of creating debt bearing a higher rate of interest to pay off debt bearing a lower. At least the public credit had remained unshaken and whenever the government had called out for money it had not been slow in coming.

This service seemed no less desirable once the war was brought to an end. After a generation of international turmoil the government like everybody else found it hard to put its faith in a lasting peace, and the sinking fund remained one

1 Briefly, the sinking fund operated thus: each quarter a payment of £250,000 was made out of the consolidated fund to the Commissioners for the Reduction of the National Debt.

They used the money to redeem stock, and the dividends which accrued were used to redeem still more.

guarantee that huge sums could be commanded if the worst came to the worst. Except for Hamilton the economist, who in his Enquiry concerning the National Debt (1813) argued that a sinking fund was no more efficacious than an annual surplus of revenue, hardly anyone as yet thought there was a better way of paying off the massive debt run up in the last twenty-two years. The faults and failings the sinking fund did have were blamed wholly on the war and not on its own shortcomings. To all appearances, until war had broken out in 1793 it had worked perfectly, Pitt redeeming £10,000,000 of the 3 per cents in under seven years, and there seemed to be no reason at all why it should work less well, even according to Hamilton's precepts, now that real surpluses were again attainable. Because the nation believed in it the fund had its own justification. If it needed any other the government did not have to look beyond the first few years of peace. For by 1815 the sum at the fund's disposal was approaching an amount equal to one forty-fifth of the total debt, which was when cancellation of the redeemed stock might begin, which was also when "the accumulations of it will ... be fairly at the disposal of the public ... either for the purpose of peace establishment or of reduction of taxes."¹ The climax of the whole operation, then, lay clearly in sight. To press forward was to arrive in a world of stable expenditure and progressively decreasing public debt. To turn about was to destroy the work of nigh thirty years and a system of proven merit and acceptability. Put thus which way to go could never be in question.

1 In January 1815 Lord Liverpool thought this point would be reached in 1819. Liverpool, ii. 135. The war upset this calculation. More money was taken from the fund in the course of the year, and as a result on 1 February 1816 the actual sinking fund was slightly less than it had been a year before. PP, 1814-15, viii. 228-9, 1816, xi. 228-9.

With the sinking fund the sacred cow of government finance, the alternatives left the ministers for raising money were a loan and continuation of part of the war taxes. To arrange the first was temptingly easy, despite talk that the nation's resources were near exhaustion. If the government advertised fresh stock on the loan market it was sure to sell fast because the depression had made the money world uncertain and over-cautious and investment with unimpeachable security was an opportunity too good to be missed by anyone. But not for a moment was this contemplated. It was, so the ministers thought, a shabby trick to play on the country. They assumed, quite unreasonably, that a loan would aggravate the credit shortage, that interest rates would be encouraged to rise and that any money they took for their own use could be put to better by the private sector. Obviously, public spending on a large scale had yet to be recognised as suitable medicine for a deflating economy. Indeed, in their ignorance the ministers threatened to do nothing right, seeing that if they refused to borrow to make up the deficit in their budget they had perforce to step up taxation, when lighter taxation to encourage heavier private spending was as good a way to ginger the economy as the other. Luckily, they were bound to think twice before they fell back on the alternative of keeping up the war taxes, for they knew from the great furore there had been a year earlier, when they had been ready to use them to wind up the war expenses, that the country would never take their renewal lying down. In the parliament to come Castlereagh was to chide the people for their "ignorant impatience of taxation," and although the opposition made sure that he lived to regret the remark, it did sum up the government's dilemma very nicely. The people were impatient because they saw no need for war taxes when the war was won. They were ignorant because the government knew its

responsibilities better than they did. Inevitably, the ministers had to go some way to meet popular fads and fancies. The question was how far.

A neat way was found out of the difficulty eventually. In the middle of December Vansittart confided his financial plans to Henry Bankes, a prominent independent in the House of Commons, "the substance of which was an intended reduction of the Property Tax to five per cent, and a small loan of five or six millions."¹ Most abhorred of all the war taxes, the property tax - more correctly, it was a tax on income - brought in over £14,000,000 in 1815.² At the new rate it would bring in half that, so it was by no means an empty gesture to popular feelings. On the other hand, the loan was a happy arrangement as far as the government was concerned. The Bank was asked to make the advance and the directors cheerfully complied, not least because the ministers had given them a fair deal earlier on by promptly reducing the government's 'overdraft' when they had become very uneasy about its amount. This promise of credit tidied everything up. The official letter to the Governor and Deputy-Governor had made the government's point of view clear, that it was "of the greatest importance to the public interest, to provide for the expenses of the present year with as little pressure as possible upon the Money Market,"³ and a small loan from the Bank fitted the bill perfectly. Of course, each measure had yet to be sent forward to receive parliament's blessing, and it was no good the government deluding itself that the opposition would stay silent when that moment arrived. Some of the objectionable war taxes remained, borrowing to make ends meet during peace

1 Colchester, ii. 563.

2 PP. 1816, xiv. 3.

3 16 January 1816, ibid., xiii. 345.

always looked like shoddy finance and until the ministers justified the expenditure item by item there was no saying that either was really necessary. But Vaneittart could look parliament straight in the face and say that he had tackled the problem of depression, and tackled it in an unexceptionable way. When it was believed that a shortage of money was the main trouble, to reduce taxes, to keep clear of the loan market and to keep repaying the debt was the right medicine for any government to prescribe.

There was no need at all for parliament to meet before Christmas, for enough was left over from the generous votes of the previous session, made in anticipation of a longer war, to ensure that the government would not run short of money before the New Year was well in.¹ As long as the negotiations continued at Paris a meeting would only have hampered Castlereagh anyway. More likely than not parliament would never have kept a proper hold on its tongue, leaving him the awkward job of explaining away the gaffes and gossip emanating from Westminster; and even if it did behave itself there was no saying what might follow if the negotiating parties once got it into their heads that Great Britain was impatient to bring matters to a conclusion.² Above all though, the government had to bear in mind the effect of Castlereagh's absence abroad. Even if his fumbings for words and his famous circumlocutions made him a laughing stock on occasions, his authority in the Commons was quite beyond dispute. As one journalist of the day recorded: "... his handsome person, his intelligent and well-defined countenance,

1 Castlereagh, xi. 24.

2 "You may rely upon me, if I am alive, for the meeting of Parliament, whenever you may assemble, but for God's sake save us a session before Christmas if possible. It is prejudicial to us in all shapes." Castlereagh to Lord Bathurst, 20 October 1815, Bathurst, p.391.

his conciliatory tone, his graceful manners, his mildness, urbanity, and invincible courtesy, ensure him popularity and even fondness from the House Personal and even political animosity loses daily some of its rancour, from the influence of that gentleness which never irritates, and is as slow to be irritated; whose polish makes the sharpest arrow, which anger can shoot, glide from him harmless, and whose softness neutralizes the most acrid venom he is perhaps the greatest favourite, since the time of Lord North, in an assembly consisting four-fifths of Englishmen."¹ Nor were impeccable manners, an even temper and a thick hide his only parliamentary qualities. His hauteur may have been a sure armour against the brilliant invective of Brougham and others but when aroused he could give back as good as he got with his own sarcasm, one government man indeed likening him to a top "wah, spins best when it is most whipped."² Certainly his colleagues were not a patch on him. The last occasion he had been away Vansittart, deputising as leader of the House, had cut a sorry figure and the rest of the front bench had been no better. What made matters worse was that the promising young men like Peel and Palmerston had yet to find their feet in general debate and were virtually speechless except when something concerning their own departments cropped up.³ There was only Castlereagh, in the words of the journalist quoted earlier, "to fight the pitched battles with the armies of Whiggism, or to ward off the desultory attacks from the adventurous marauders who start up occasionally from all quarters of the House"⁴ Without him the government depended on sheer weight of numbers to keep its writ

1 Thomas Barnes , Parliamentary Portraits, pp.13-19.

2 Robhouse, p.92.

3 Castlereagh, x. 239.

4 Parliamentary Portraits, pp.13-14.

heard in parliament, the sort of control which had a hollow ring about it when the opposition persistently took the honours of debate. Ministers had to act the part of ministers in order to remain ministers. By the end of October once it was clear that Castlereagh would be busy in Paris for another three or four weeks, the Cabinet arranged a further prorogation to the middle of January.¹

The government fully expected financial questions to be the main bugbear when parliament did reassemble, especially that concerning the property tax. Not two months after Waterloo Lord Liverpool warned Castlereagh that a grand rumpus was in store over it,² and on the eve of the meeting of parliament he was just as gloomy, finding it "quite impossible to be certain, or even confident of the issue." Before an official announcement had even been made, he noticed, the opposition had been spotted stirring up trouble in the country, organising the petitions and meetings which by now was its recipe for success after the triumphs over the Orders-in-Council in 1812 and the war taxes three years later.³ A full muster of friends was imperative if this "Clamour" was going to be held at bay in the Commons. As it happened, another item on the parliamentary agenda made a good attendance equally desirable. Lord Liverpool, his ear to the ground as always, heard early on that the opposition was planning mischief when the peace treaties were laid before parliament, and if the contest came to a vote he wanted a bumper majority to show the world that Great Britain

- 1 About the middle of October the signing of the treaties was expected to take place before the end of the month. However, a hitch occurred and it was not done until 20 November. Bathurst, p.389.
- 2 Castlereagh, I. 476.
- 3 For example, The Times, 25 January 1816 included a report from the Hull Advertiser that several meetings were planned in the West Riding.

refused to find fault with Castlereagh's work.¹ Probably his reasoning did not stop here either. Inasmuch as the debate seemed likely to be the first trial of strength in the country's new situation it had an especial importance, and when winning could put the opposition in its place for the rest of the session a handsome majority became all the more dearer.

Castlereagh, as leader of the House of Commons, sent out the usual circular to the government's friends about three weeks before the meeting. It told them what date had been fixed and politely requested their attendance, vaguely going on to say that "public business of importance will be immediately proceeded on."² The summons was by no means peremptory. Nor could it be until parties consolidated and claimed an allegiance which at this stage most members owed only to themselves. The Irish members whom Castlereagh addressed certainly felt this way. They told Peel, who as Chief Secretary in Dublin had the job of whipping them in, that the note was "a mere matter of course" and insisted on staying at home to mind matters unless a more pressing invitation came meanwhile. Hurriedly Peel wrote off to London to find out how things really stood, and learning from his chief that the opposition was already limbering up he passed on an urgent plea for support which explained the situation far better than the official circular had done.³ Perhaps if the government had kept its rank and file better informed in the first place there would have been less recalcitrance. But this again was the curse of politics without party. The Cabinet invariably led, and assumed that the rest, unorganised,

1 Lord Liverpool to Peel, 28 January 1816, Add. MSS. 40181, ff.66-8. The letter is printed in Liverpool, ii.251-2, but is wrongly dated 20 January.

2 The circular was dated 11 January. A copy is to be found in The Times, 18 January 1816.

3 Liverpool, ii. 249-50; circular letters, Peel to various Irish M.Ps., 30 January 1816, Add. MSS. 40290, f.52.

leaderless and almost habitually obedient, would follow.

The attendance at Westminster on the opening day turned out to be satisfactory enough, even though the Irish reported for duty sadly under strength and in fact still were two months afterwards.¹ However, the ministers made no complaints. Any annoyance they may have felt was checked by the heartening sight of the opposition in disarray once again. As long as the war with France had lasted Fox's heirs and successors had occupied an uneasy perch, appearing to show by their persistent niggling no great liking for a conflict everyone else thoroughly approved and to admire a man, Bonaparte, who was a European abomination. Being at odds with public feeling was bad enough, but they had been for ever scrapping with their allies as well. With the Grenvilles reluctant critics of the war and distinctly uncomfortable in the company of parliamentary reformers like Whitbread they and the Whigs had really pulled together only when Catholic emancipation had come up for discussion, to which both believed themselves irrevocably committed. All this lay in the past though. Whatever the record of incompatibility the government could not count on it lasting for ever. The war largely explained the Whigs' discomfiture. With peace there was no reason why they could not make friends with the people again, and also get on better with the Grenvilles at the same time. A rumour, then, of angry words and lost tempers at Brooks's just before parliament met was sweet music indeed for the government's ear, and sweeter still when the story proved to have some foundation. Romilly and others, sick and tired of what Brougham called "half measures" and "temporising plans", bludgeoned the leadership against its better judgement into trying an amendment when the Address was brought up on the first day,² only to have

1 Peel to William Gregory, 27 March 1816, *ibid.*, ff.173-4.

2 Fortescue, x.412; Creevey, i.247.

the Grenvilles put up signs advertising their complete dissociation. Lord Grenville refused at once to commit himself or his friends, being little inclined, he said, if he were in the Commons "to vote for an amendment at the close of a debate in which more than half of the principles & opinions urged in its support would probably be much more repugnant to mine than anything said by its adversaries."¹ His brother had a similar message for Tierney, the acting leader of the opposition, telling him that he doubted "whether any amendment could be framed that would not give a stronger appearance of resistance ... than our friends would or could concur in."² As for Charles Williams-Wynn, the leader of their little party in the Commons, he ignored a summons from "the anonymous Gentlemen who in Ponsonby's absence have taken upon themselves the office of Leaders," and continued to sit tight in faraway Wales.³

The news that all was not well in the opposition's house soon got round of course. Huskisson kept Canning in his Portuguese exile fully up to date, though to account for the puzzling absence of the party leaders he did a little embroidering of his own:

The Opposition, I understand, are much divided; and in private not very sparing of their abuse of one another, which is not the best way to heal their dissensions. In public they still manage to keep up, tho' rather awkwardly, an appearance of cordiality and union. Grey is not come to Town. It is given out that He is ill - I believe He is sulky. Ponsonby had called a Meeting at his House for the 31st of last Month. The Whigs went according to Summons; but their Leader was not arrived, nor is He yet come. He too is said to be ill. I fancy He has caught Grey's Complaint.⁴

That things were as bad as they looked became obvious when the

1 Lord Grenville to Charles Williams-Wynn, 24 January 1816, Coed-y-maen MSS.

2 Fortescue, x. 412.

3 Charles Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 27 January 1816, Coed-y-maen MSS.

4 Huskisson to Canning, 6 February 1816, Canning MSS. Grey was ill and family concerns detained Ponsonby in Ireland.

opposition lined up to fire off its first volley at the government. The ministers deliberately made the Prince Regent's Speech as uncontroversial as possible, "leaving it open to all who voted in its favour," so Lord Liverpool explained, "to exercise a judgment, and to form an opinion more deliberately upon the details, when they are supplied from the offices of government." All that was asked of parliament was "a general congratulation on the restoration of peace," which was exactly what the Grenvilles thought should be the sum of the first day's business.¹ But the opposition hotheads would not be reined in by their leaders. According to plan an amendment was put forward in the House of Commons when the Address was moved, and only this far did "the most considerable Members" intend to go, mindful as they were of the poor attendance on their side of the House and that the Grenvilles would never help out if it came to a division. So when Tierney got up to speak he declined a contest, which was the signal for an exodus en masse as members from both sides rushed off home for an early supper. Then came disaster. Hardly had he sat down before one of his back-benchers was on his feet calling for the division he had just renounced, and to keep up some semblance of party amity he ate his words without a murmur and trooped into the lobby with a handful of discharges where they went down in defeat by 90 votes to 23.² From this performance it was hard for the Whigs to

1 Fortescue, x. 412. Hansard, 1st ser., xxxii. 12;

2 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxii. 17-63; Memoirs of the Life of Sir Samuel Romilly, iii. 213-14. Of course the Grenvilles chuckled at the Whigs' discomfiture: "... the final division after Tierney had announced that none would take place is a good illustration of the degree of discipline & tactick which may be expected from that party during the present Session" Charles Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 5 February 1816, Coed-y-maen MSS.

wring a drop of consolation. Apart from the debacle at the end, when even the amendment's mover and seconder could not be found, the Grenvilles had left them completely in the lurch, there had been annoying defections - among them Lord Milton, Fitzwilliam's heir - and most provoking of all, except for Vansittart and Castlereagh not one official man had bothered to open his mouth. "It was bad enough," wrote Tierney musing on his party's disarray, "to have brought up many from the country who when they came into the house were told there would be no division, but it made it a good deal worse when, after they were gone ... they found that one had taken place."¹

Yet the debate, rout though it had been, did warn the government to watch its step in one respect. Economy all round was obviously going to be the theme tune which the opposition would thump out for the whole of the session. The amendment sought to pledge the House to undertake "a careful revision of our Establishments, Civil and Military, with a view to such an immediate reduction of the same as may be required by the principles of a rigid economy, and by a due regard to the Liberties of the Subject."² When the news that the property tax would be continued was squeezed out of Vansittart by Lord John Russell, Brougham at once asked the country for a repeat performance of the petitioning extravaganza so successful the year before. Tierney urged the House not to vote a penny until some idea had been given of what would be spent in toto, in case the government got an amount piecemeal which parliament would have forbidden had it known better. And Coke of Norfolk threatened a motion on the malt excise if the ministers did not come

1 Tierney to Lord Grey, 2 February 1816, Grey MSS., Prior's Kitchen, Durham, quoted by Austin Mitchell, The Whigs in Opposition, 1815-1830, p.90.

2 CJ, lxxi. 5.

to their senses and do away with it smartly.¹ Here at long last was a way to win honour and glory on the political field, and well the Whigs knew it. There was no better cause than economy and retrenchment for them to champion. The war was over so that the government could neither use it as an excuse nor as a distraction. A depression was in full swing so that the work brooked no delay. It was a cause sure to bring them popularity and a chance of victory at Westminster, when they could expect neither, for the moment anyway, from Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform. Truly the government would have to bow in the wind a little or break.

The first occasion the opposition could really take the government to task for extravagance was when the House of Commons went into committee of supply over the army estimates. According to the programme which the ministers had sketched out this was to take place immediately after the peace treaties were voted on 15 February.² Before then, however, Vansittart, a trifle grudgingly because "the practice was unusual," had given the House a rough resume of the budget and the military establishment in response to Tierney's pert suggestion on the first day,³ and the opposition members presumably joined battle well-armed with the facts and figures they had had a fortnight to pore over. The game they had in mind was an unusual one. At this juncture, with the daredevil way the ministers were managing things, it seemed that the property tax was going to be foisted on the people before they had made themselves heard. On 26 February Vansittart suddenly announced that he would put the question to the House in two day's time and while the opposition wrung a further two day's grace out of him before the evening

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xxiii. 33, 36, 39-40, 55, 59.

2 Liverpool, ii. 251.

3 Hansard, 1st ser., xxiii. 376-89. Castlereagh promised such a statement on 5 February. Ibid., 311.

was through, it was nothing more than a small mercy to be thankful for.¹ For the great flood of petitions which the Whigs were counting on was not yet in full spate. On the day that Vansittart sprung his surprise only about fifty lay on the table in front of the Speaker's chair. Three weeks later it was to groan under the weight of four hundred. Somehow precious time had to be won and as it was the invariable practice not to go into committee of ways and means until a supply had been voted,² a filibuster over the army estimates was the line of attack to be preferred above all others. Yet to obstruct the King's service by obstructing parliamentary business was unusual because for a century oppositions had been doing their level best to escape from the odious denominations of irresponsibility and disloyalty which attached to them. The difference this time was that such skulduggery seemed unlikely to place the Whigs in a poor light inasmuch as the petitions showed that a large army and the property tax were one and the same evil. As the inhabitants of one ward in the City put it: "... this obnoxious and inquisitorial Tax can only be proposed, with a view of maintaining an enormous Military Establishment in a time of profound Peace, a measure hostile to the spirit of the British Constitution, and highly injurious to the best interests of society."³ Altogether the opposition could look forward to good sport, certain as they were that the wretchedly inarticulate ministers had no hope of out-talking them.

On 26 February Vansittart moved to refer the army estimates to the committee of supply. Usually the occasion

1 Ibid., 834-5.

2 John Hatsell, Precedents of Proceedings in the House of Commons, iii. 196-7. See also Hansard, 1st ser., xxxiii.24.

3 Petition of the Inhabitants of Farringdon Within, CJ, lxxi. 95.

was uneventful, a matter of form quickly passed by. That the country should have a standing army was never arguable, and any difference there was over numbers could be thrashed out best in the question and answer of the committee proceeding and later in debate when the report was brought up if there happened to be dissentients around who wished to go as far as this. Thus as soon as Vansittart made his motion and the opposition got up barking it became obvious what their game was. They were not against a standing army because that was nonsense. They were not demanding fresh estimates because that had no point when the House of Commons could vote what money it pleased.¹ They were playing for time by pretending "that his majesty's ministers recommended a system, which, if it did not produce an immediate military despotism, had a tendency to a state of things of which a military despotism must be the final result that because the proposed measures appeared to them to be in their nature unconstitutional, they ought not to be submitted for a moment to the committee for investigation."² As a result for three days the rest of the House had to sit back and listen to a tiresome harangue about how standing armies in peacetime were an abhorrence in the good old days of William III, and how large ones assisted the Crown in its nefarious work of making sycophants out of honourable members while instilling into the people these bad habits of "military insubordination" which a free country should ever frown upon.³

When all was said and done though, the opposition came out of it very well indeed. The motion on the property tax had to be put off for five and later ten days, a delay which suited

1 However, if the government had been defeated, the House would have addressed the Crown for new estimates. But this was unprecedented.

2 The Master of the Mint, a Cabinet minister, summarising the opposition's argument in the debate. Hansard, 1st ser., xcxi. 997.

3 Ibid., 845, 857-8, 860-1, 963-72, 988.

them down to the ground;¹ and just as pleasing was the government's poor showing both on the floor and in the lobbies. Except for the first night, when he never spoke, Castlereagh remained at home sick in bed,² which saw his side of the House having to make do with a string of second-rate speakers and Vansittart's incompetent generalship. Nonetheless, up to the last night the government did not do too badly. Lord Palmerston, never straying far from the facts and figures he had at his fingertips as Secretary-at-War, made a good speech which did a lot to kill the notion that the army should be content with the establishment of 1791. Peel followed him the next day with a lengthy expose of Ireland's critical state and made out an excellent case for a garrison of 25,000 regulars while about it. But after this fine start the government failed to hold its own. On the last night the opposition dominated proceedings by holding the floor three-quarters of the time and regaling the House with a succession of heady speeches from such star performers as Lord Folkestone, Mackintosh, Burdett and Tierney. It fell to Vansittart as acting leader to sum up on behalf of the government and try and cut the Whigs down to size. In doing it, so Peel reported, he "made himself ridiculous." He was too apologetic about going over the same ground twice to keep the House from getting restless, and asides about the produce of taxes and the sorry plight of midshipmen on the beach only made it worse. As a summing-up speech it lacked the tidiness it should have had and instead left the House to make rhyme or reason, if it could, out of a strange jumble of irrelevancies, second-hand opinions and slipshod arguments. That night surely, Castlereagh was sadly missed. To cap a dismal performance the division shamed the government as well. The opposition "divided very strong" with 121 votes against 241,

1 That is, until 11 March. . Ibid., 1051, 1060.

2 George IV, II. 150.

over forty more than they had collected the week before on the peace treaties and as good a minority as they had made throughout the whole of the previous session. Economy was obviously a banner under which "advanced Whigs," conservative Whigs, the Grenvilles and friendly country gentlemen would march happily together.¹

In the committee the government could expect the going to be just as hard, if not harder. The procedure there allowed a member to speak more than once on a question if he chose, and this gave the opposition ample opportunities for more time-wasting and a thorough grilling of the ministers into the bargain. There was nothing to stop them from insisting on voting the estimates item by item either, though during the war, partly in the interests of security, the practice had grown up of proposing a single vote to cover every branch of the army at home and abroad.² But whatever procedural tricks the opposition might try to pull off, it was the ugly mood the independent country gentlemen were in that worried the ministers more than anything else. They had an inkling that all was not well right at the end of the debate on 28 February when Stuart-Wortley, a leading light among the squirearchy at Westminster, commended Tierney for a thought-provoking speech and went on to remind the government "that the time for economy was come," as if hitherto its indifference had fooled nobody.³ Unmistakably it was an admonition, and one which the ministers did not dare snigger at. If Stuart-Wortley and his friends thought so badly of them, a majority could no longer be taken for granted,

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xcii. 843-74, 909-32, 955-1017; Peel to Lord Whitworth, 27, 28, 29 February 1816, Add. MSS. 40290, ff. 106-111.

2 Hansard, 1st ser., xciii. 134.

3 Ibid., xcii. 1016-17.

and if they happened to go down in defeat they shuddered to think what the consequences might be. It looked very much as though some fast talking in the committee was all that could save them from an embarrassing scrape.

The first vote which came before the committee of supply had nothing to do with money. The Mutiny Act presupposed a standing army, and the technicality had to be observed that until the House of Commons took cognizance of one by passing the establishment not a soul could set about renewing it. A question of establishment was of course a question of numbers, but in explaining their arithmetic - in saying what troops were needed where - the ministers invariably found themselves defending their foreign commitments, colonial policy and suchlike while about it.¹ It was an excellent chance for members to peer into many different corners and the opposition might well have chosen to reserve their fire until this moment. That they did not was less a misjudgement than a shrewd appraisal of where their real strength lay, for in the committee the government had opportunities for answering back which it never had in formal debate and could get down to details the opposition knew nothing about.

As it happened the country gentlemen saved the Whigs the bother of having to repeat themselves. No sooner had Lord Palmerston moved the establishment than Bankes stood up to give the government a piece of his mind, and Stuart-Wortley and Wilberforce both followed suit. Why, they asked, should the country depart from the old policy of a small army and a large navy when the ministers boasted each day that the Paris treaties

1 See Castlereagh's comment that such a question "branched out into discussions so multifarious in their bearings, so mixed up with all the relations of the country" Ibid., 1096-7.

guaranteed lasting peace in Europe? Why trouble about the land forces when supremacy at sea made it impossible for the colonies to come to any harm if the worst did happen? Why ape the silly Continental habit of keeping up a large standing army as a showpiece when it would only tempt Great Britain to meddle where she need not? Why not disarm since neither danger nor disadvantage could come of it? "We had no enemies to fear abroad," Banks was reported to have concluded, "but we had two great enemies at home - a national debt, and a most improvident expenditure. Let these be kept down, and the country would be saved. If that were not done, years of peace would not invigorate us, and on the breaking out of any new war we should be in a state, not of strength, but of exhaustion."¹

To wean the country gentlemen from long-cherished prejudices of isolation and economy was impossible but to hear them plain-spoken was an unnerving experience for any front bench. The fact that Castlereagh, newly risen from a sick bed and still unwell, got up to answer Banks showed how seriously the government viewed the situation, for usually he spared himself to deal with opposition giants like Tierney and Brougham. His speech on this occasion, together with another which closed the discussion two nights later, almost certainly saved his side from a grievous embarrassment in the lobbies. As always he seemed to be prompted into a good performance by a hostile audience. He never made fancy speeches. He sought to inform rather than to delight, and happily he had the knack of making it an interesting exercise, being content to drum a few plain truths into the House and leave it at that. Now he took pains to point out that the estimates before it "were the intermediate estimates

1 Ibid., 1091-6.

between a state of war and peace," which left members perfectly free to take a fresh look at the position in a year's time when a permanent peace establishment could be decided. He pooh-poohed the idea, implied if not uttered, that Pitt could have done better had he been in charge. There could be no going back to 1792 because since then Great Britain had found herself a dozen new colonies and also had to meet a charge for half-pay and pensions amounting to little less than the total cost of the army in that year. Even if she made do with a third less troops, as Bankes wished, the saving would not nearly correspond thanks to this "dead expense." And anyway the figure for the establishment was an exaggeration in so far as what was an army of 99,000 on paper was vastly smaller in actual fact.¹ It was in this vein that he hounded the country gentlemen from their attitude of penny-wise and pound-foolish, forcing them to acknowledge that the government knew best what the national interest demanded. Only Bankes, Stuart-Wortley and a few others remained impenitent enough to provoke a division, and though the opposition joined them in full array the ministers made good their ground with a majority of 72. When the report was brought up two days afterwards (8 March) they reaffirmed that the House was with them with one of 68, Wilberforce talking in vain about how bayonets threatened the constitution and "military habits" the country's morals.²

Nevertheless, the government hardly romped home. Majorities of about 70 left much to be desired, as Castlereagh's reports to the Prince Regent at Brighton made plain. While the division of 28 February on the question of referring the estimates to the committee was "a good one" in his view, the

1 Ibid., 1096-1109, 1257-63.

2 Ibid., xxiii. 99-102.

minority of barely 200 votes in support of the establishment a week later was regrettably "not more considerable," a disappointment Peel too did not hide when writing to his chief in Ireland. As for the performance on 8 March when the report was brought up, the figures spoke for themselves; 190 in the government lobby and a majority of 68 was more regrettable still.¹ Perhaps the ministers should have rejoiced to get off so lightly but Huskisson interestingly hinted why a celebration was out of place. The official interest in the House of Commons could be counted on to contribute about 60 votes in an important division, and a majority roughly equalling that number looked very bad, conveying as it did an impression that the government had used the Crown's influence to pervert the judgement of the free and independent part.² Times had changed. In Walpole's day no minister had been ashamed to parade a great army of placemen to get the King's business done. Now the government preferred to win by merit rather than manipulation. Nearly forty years of reform propaganda had given influence an odium it could never shake off and the ministers hated to appeal to make decisive use of it. It was almost as if the art of winning could not be carried to more reprehensible lengths.

By the time the establishment was voted, the government's parliamentary timetable was again in a shambles. What had been rushed through in two nights during the war years had already taken six and only a preliminary vote had been dealt with, which left Castlereagh exclaiming that "the history of Parliament does not furnish an instance of so protracted and

1 George IV, ii. 150, 154, 155; Peel to Lord Whitworth, 7 March 1816, Add. MSS. 40290, ff. 125-6.

2 Huskisson to Canning, 13 March 1816, Canning MSS. See also Hansard, 1st ser., xxiv. 283.

determined an opposition to the Army estimates."¹ All too clearly the property tax could no longer be proposed on 11 March, though the ministers needed no reminding that precious parliamentary time was fast running out. On 5 April the authorising act expired and three weeks left them little time to get fresh legislation through if the opposition, as was more than likely, chose to harass it the utmost within their power. In the same way other important business was also being jeopardised. Easter, when a good many members went home and stayed there, was only a month away, and because the country gentlemen were in the van of the exodus it was the government, less a party than the opposition, which suffered most from the thinner attendance after the holiday. Not that the ministers faced actual defeat. It was simply that important measures brought forward too late were unlikely to pass through the House attended by the thumping majorities any administration loved to parade, and for this reason alone the Cabinet may have begun to regret that parliament had not been called back into session a fortnight earlier. Certainly Castlereagh and Vansittart postponed their motion on the property tax for yet another week only because they had to.²

Of course money had yet to be voted for the army, and here the opposition could be as great a nuisance as they had been all along if they insisted on toiling through the estimates item by item. As soon as Williams-Wynn gave formal notice that he would move an instruction to the committee to consider the charge for the army under nine separate heads the government knew that they were planning mischief of this sort, and when the House came to decide the matter Lord Palmerston to temporise

¹ George IV, ii. 156.

² Hansard, 1st ser., xciii. 132-3.

suggested three votes while Castlereagh chimed in with a reminder that "local inquiries" were an unprofitable and uninteresting way to occupy parliament's valuable time. However, the opposition were determined to go the whole hog. Specific deductions such as they had in mind, they said, required specific votes. Only at the last minute, after strangers had been ordered to withdraw, did Castlereagh concede the point,¹ no doubt to avoid the appearance of having something to hide and also in the hope of wearing the opposition out by beating them as often as they brought a question forward. As it turned out, little inconvenience resulted. The opposition soon did tire of a game they seemed to have no chance of winning. On the first night (11 March) they pressed three divisions and lost them all fairly convincingly. On the next (13 March) they were no longer game for anything. Williams-Wynn despaired of ever breaking the ministerial majority and over twenty votes were hurried through without the House being cleared once. Shortly after these resolutions had been reported and voted, they announced their surrender. A few brave words from Tierney, deploring "defiance of the sense of the House and the Country" wound up ten nights of bitter though often tedious altercation.²

Not surprisingly, the opposition took their defeat very much to heart. They knew they were right to take up the cause of economy and were deeply disappointed that the government had not been run harder when for the first time for years the advantage had lain with them. So many tricks in the parliamentary book had been tried, and yet, as Tierney remarked, not a farthing had been struck off the estimates as a result.³

1 George IV, 11. 155; Hansard, 1st ser., xxxiii. 134-5.

2 Ibid., 138-55, 247-54, 384-8.

3 Ibid., 387.

Their only consolation, and word probably did get around sooner or later, was that the government was equally out of sorts. For not a jot or tittle of the estimates may have been altered by the House but the ministers had amended the figures which they had first proffered; and fiddling like this was not forgotten in a moment. People were bound to wonder what they were up to when they saw them make do with £340,000 less after endlessly repeating that the estimates represented the greatest possible saving,¹ and the opposition, without taking exception to the reductions themselves, could make out a serious charge of double-dealing on the evidence and inconveniently press it when a question of economy next arose. Huskisson certainly thought the move a clumsy one, calling it "a concession which comes rather awkwardly after the general assurance in the Speech that the utmost economy had been attended to in all the Estimates"² The truth was that the ministers were afraid, not dishonest. Parliament's earnestness over expenditure and establishments had surprised them by its vehemence and when they told the Prince Regent of "unprecedented difficulties ... in all financial discussions in the House of Commons" they meant every word.³

- 1 This figure is arrived at by comparing the estimates with the sums voted. The reductions only applied to the regimental establishments. i.e.

	Estimate (£)	Vote (£)
Household Troops	387,216	387,216
Dragon Guards and Dragoons in Great Britain, Royal Waggon Train		333,693
Infantry in Great Britain	3,588,752	514,288
Infantry and Cavalry abroad		1,539,707
Cavalry in Ireland		142,872
Infantry in Ireland	3,974,000	718,188
		3,634,024

- 2 Huskisson to Canning, 13 March 1816, Canning MSS.

- 3 George IV. ii. 158.

Especially vexing was the niggardly support given by the country gentlemen, who preferred to stay away rather than vote against the popular mood and with a party they did not fancy.¹ Probably in their eyes it was a nice reconciliation of self-interest and loyalty, but it did leave the government very much in the lurch. Though two calls of the House were enforced over the army estimates to the extent of having two absentees placed in the custody of the serjeant-at-arms, the attendance throughout was remarkably poor; and Tierney was able to draw some solace from the fact that only about a third of the members had abetted the ministers in their wickedness.² Perhaps the figures for one division explain the government's predicament best. On that of 8 March, when the establishment was finally voted, over 300, including the tellers, went into the lobbies. Forty-eight had been excused attendance when the House had been called over earlier that night, and another 48 already had leave of absence. Although 236 defaulters were named at the call, 101 turned up in time to vote, which left 135 who either had good reasons for being absent or who deliberately abstained. Even assuming that all were genuine absentees, which was quite impossible, there remained at least 100 who attended the House to answer the call but who did not bother to vote.³ Paradoxically, abstention on this scale was almost

1 See Castlereagh to the Prince Regent, 7 March 1816, *ibid.*, p.154: "... after so long and so expensive a war, the clamour for reduction of expence is making itself felt, and the country gentlemen are very reluctant to face it."

2 *Hansard*, 1st ser., xxxiii. 387.

3 Lists of the majority are to be found in *The Times*, 12 March 1816 and the *Morning Chronicle*, 11 March 1816. There are one or two discrepancies between them. The minority is listed in *Hansard*, 1st ser., xxxiii. 117-18. The names of defaulters when the House was called over are given in *CJ*, lxi. 159-60, and those excused in the Colchester papers, PRO 30/9.

as good as a vote of confidence, for in stopping short of outright opposition the country gentlemen showed that their aversion for the measure was not matched by aversion for the men who produced it. Indeed, as long as the Whigs remained under suspicion as Catholic and Radical sympathisers, the government was likely to continue surviving in this fashion. Caught between the devil and the deep, the country gentlemen had no other way of making their displeasure known.

The vote on the property tax, however, which now loomed up, allowed the body of independents to act with less reserve. In a way they had no choice. When the whole nation was in a frenzy over the question and constituents everywhere were badgering their representatives, the lot of fence-sitters became an unpleasant one, and even members who dodged a commitment right to the end knew full well that to sneak away without voting would never pass unnoticed. But while the people had parliamentarians on the run, the country gentlemen had fewer misgivings about going into opposition anyway, simply because this time the government's existence was not at stake. Over the army estimates it had been. If the House of Commons had thrown these back in the Cabinet's face it would have been discarding what the other thought was essential "for the protection and safety of the Country." If, on the other hand, the ministers were beaten on the property tax, parliament would only veto a financial plan which they preferred and not one they deemed essential. By the custom of the constitution such a defeat was not a resigning matter.¹

From the beginning the government made little or no headway against the massive prejudice surrounding the tax. The

¹ Huskisson to Canning, 13 March 1816, Canning MSS.

idea that it was an impost inflicting "inquisitorial vexations" and "multiplied oppressions" was so firmly fixed in the public mind as to be scarcely eradicable. Not that the ministers ever fooled themselves that its renewal would be plain sailing. Lord Liverpool admitted to being scared stiff every time he thought about it.¹ Sensibly though, they never tried to cram the objectionable old act lock, stock and barrel down parliament's throat but rather deigned to dance a little to the country's tune. Apart from lowering the standard rate from two shillings to one shilling in the pound, the gist of their plan, they offered a generous relaxation of Schedule B of the act - the so-called tenant's tax - and did their best to minimise the prying into private affairs which caused general indignation. The first was a sop to help keep the agricultural interest quiet throughout a lean year, and the Office for Taxes dug out figures to show the government's beneficence to full advantage. Going by the 1812 returns, 527,000 out of 589,000 occupiers would now have nothing to pay and the Exchequer would collect £200,000 instead of £2,000,000.² The other major modification was equally handsome. It affected those chargeable under Schedule D; that is to say, those in receipt of "annual Profits or Gains arising ... from any Kind of Property" other than land or government stock. Under the old act, which except for one interruption had been in force since 1806, these persons made an annual return to commissioners who were local notables but responsible to the Tax Office through the "bureaucratic curiosity" of paid officials. Understandably, disclosures of a private nature to either had always been a sore point. To mend matters the government proposed changes which made for less meddling and

1 e.g. Castlereagh, x.476; Liverpool, ii. 251.

2 PP, 1816, xiv. 101, 103.

and more confidential treatment. Henceforward each individual would have the option of paying according to his old assessment with no questions asked or appealing for a reduction. If he appealed only one commissioner instead of several would handle his case, and if he disliked this he himself might nominate referees to look into his affairs on the commissioner's behalf.¹

Without doubt these were welcome changes, certain to take some wind out of the opposition's sails. But if they were meant to save the property tax from the country's vengeance the ministers should have announced the good news much sooner than they did. Early on, as early as the second day of the session in fact, Vansittart disclosed that the government had in mind modifications "to remove a part of the pressure from some classes of society." Ten days later he let out that they would apply to Schedule B but until the beginning of March, when at long last he got down to details, the House had no more to go on than this. By then the country was in a fine rage, and it was too late to do much good. As for the improvements in Schedule D, parliament was kept in the dark about them right up to the last minute.²

To dilly-dally like this was hardly the way to persuade the people to look kindly upon the tax. If the truth be known, the ministers did not care much what they thought. In their view the people had a legitimate right to complain and parliament was bound to hear them out, but popular judgement was always suspect because it was passionate and partial, markedly so when a "very natural impatience" of taxation asserted itself. By comparison parliament was a creature of reason, a parent over children, meant to take a parent's notice of these tantrums.

1 See Vansittart's explanation of the modification in Hansard, 1st ser., xxxiii. 430-2.

2 Ibid., xxxi. 65, 382-3, 1128, xxxiii. 431-2.

Said Castlereagh, speaking of the petitions against the tax:

... no one would say that the deliberative faculties of parliament ought to be so limited or paralysed by them, that the legislature of the country was to look to the sentiments entertained beyond the walls of that House for the rule and guide of the course it had to pursue.¹

This was wishful thinking. Parliament could never be that independent of the country. Even members who did not fear a scolding from their constituents hated to see the House get out of step with public opinion. "Sympathy and mutual feeling" between the two was part of the proper ordering of the constitution, they believed, and if a rupture took place the people might take it upon themselves to exact retribution in some form or other - reform and even revolution was a recurring nightmare. When the issue was clear-cut, when the country was of one mind, as it was over the property tax, parliament could never stand as firm as Castlereagh said it ought to.

Of course the government, clinging to ideas of senatorial detachment and dignity, saw no reason why it should busy itself with counter-petitions and meetings, and anyway, an appeal to the platform was quite futile when feeling against the tax ran so high. The days when "the respectable classes" could meet in cosy convocation had long passed. As public meetings had become properly public, so they had become demonstrative rather than deliberative and usually minorities saw no point in turning up just to be shouted down. If the government had got its friends to exert themselves it would have been a fiasco, not least because the meagreness of its support would have become damagingly apparent. The Whigs, then, were given a free run. Out of over four hundred petitions but half a dozen admired the property tax "for sustaining the Public Credit,

1 Ibid., xxxiii. 443. See also ibid., xxxi. 897-8, xxxii. 421-2.

for bearing with comparative lightness on the poorer and labouring classes of the community, and for reaching income in the possession of whomsoever it may be vested."¹

Strangely enough, the government was almost as indifferent in parliament itself. For weeks only a few murmurs came from the Treasury bench while the opposition rattled on and on about government lies, needy commissioners, ruined farmers and national bankruptcy every time a petition was brought forward. When ministers argued that the question was for the "calm and deliberate consideration of parliament" alone they should never have stood such nonsense for a moment. Silent contempt may have been a brave front to put up against "clamour" but it gave the ditherers no lead when they most wanted one, and this time the House had to be managed into compliance as much as at any other. There was no excuse, or at best only the feeble one that for a few days sickness laid low many on the front bench.² Over the Orders-in-Council in 1812 Brougham and his friends had used the same stratagem to bully the independents and broadcast to the nation, and their success then should have warned the ministers to answer back whatever happened. Besides, their silence after Brougham had needled them for being "ashamed to avow themselves" after "the national wish had been so unequivocally expressed" did make them seem abashed,³ when in fact the continuation of the property tax was sound finance and worth boasting about; it secured the sinking fund, relieved the money market and placed credit in private hands, good

1 Petition of the Freeholders, Justices of the Peace, and Commissioners of Supply of the County of Perth. CJ, lxxi.219.

2 Castlereagh was absent from 27 February to 4 March. Bragge-Bathurst and Wellesley-Pole were also ill at this time. Hansard, 1st ser., xxxi.1044-5. Vansittart did not attend the House on 29 February and 1 March. He wanted a short rest. Ibid., 1130.

3 Ibid., 947.

work which would find general approval. Indeed, the opposition admitted its sense by saying as little as possible about the alternatives. Yet for aught the government cared nobody needed to know it. Vansittart explained the good the tax would do when he summarised his budget on 12 February, but little else was said on the subject until the motion itself came up for consideration, far too late to bring the House and the country to their senses.¹

Within the government the deteriorating situation led to defeatist talk in plenty. Huskisson predicted a beating, and rather blithely at that, partly because he thought the government would survive it, partly because it would show him to have been right all along. In his view the ministers were mad to try the tax, and his noncommittal remarks in parliament let everybody know it.² Peel, without reason to wish the government ill, also anticipated defeat - after "the toughest battle of the Session".³ The leadership, however, never doubting that they were right and the opposition wholly wrong, were not put off by ugly portents. "Those who raise this Clamour," Lord Liverpool wrote to Canning, "have a Narrow View of their own Interest, as the Restoration of Publick Credit, The Rise of the Funds, and the consequent Fall of the Interest of Money will afford more Relief to the existing Distresses of the Country, than any other Measure which could be adopted."⁴ "Several

- 1 Ibid., 381-3, xxxii. 427-9, 448-9. Significantly, when the government on 5 and 6 March did make an effort to answer the opposition on other points, Castlereagh immediately reported an improvement in the temper of the House. George IV, ii. 154-5.
- 2 Huskisson to Canning, 13 March 1816, Canning MSS. Hansard, 1st ser., xxi. 1236-7.
- 3 Peel, i. 210, 212; Peel to Lord Whitworth, 7, 13 March 1816, Add. MSS. 40290, ff. 125-6, 144-5.
- 4 13 February 1816, Canning MSS. The letter is printed with verbal mistakes in Liverpool, ii. 253-5.

Gentlemen of considerable weight" in the House of Commons, who waited on him to remonstrate, were given the same lecture, and to scotch any rumours of a capitulation that might be getting round, he added that if the tax did go it would be parliament's and not the government's doing.¹ This was not bravado. Nor did it mean that the ministers were too jealous of their honour to back down with good grace. Rather, to see the matter through to the bitter end was a guileful way of insuring against difficulties to come. If parliament threw out the tax, on parliament's head would fall much of the opprobrium for the economic unpleasanties which would follow, so the Cabinet believed, from its alternatives. It was a neat reconciliation of the right and the expedient such as politicians love.

When at last parliament came to settle the business, the debate was a tame affair despite the weeks of strenuous rehearsal. As Brougham reminisced years afterwards: "... it speedily appeared manifest that there would be a decision without any debate; for that had been anticipated, and indeed had taken place over and over again."² Everyone was sick and tired of the subject and impatient to be done, and the speakers gave up contending with a rude and restless House after about an hour and a half. Vansittart and Castlereagh were allowed to say their pieces, but the rest, including Brougham himself, had to be short and sweet if they wanted to be heard.³ Some nights, when the opposition had been in a good tub-thumping mood, the discussions on the petitions had lasted much longer. Yet though both sides arrived on the field to find a battle was impossible, the occasion created its own excitement. The House

1 Undated memorandum, early 1819 perhaps, probably by Lord Liverpool, Add. MSS. 38741, ff. 270-6.

2 Brougham, ii. 311.

3 Hansard, 1st ser., xciii. 421-51.

was jam-packed with well over 400 members present, there was no standing room in the public galleries and a mighty throng filled the corridors outside and spilled into Palace Yard. The rousing cheer this crowd set up when a majority of thirty-seven against the tax was announced was a fitting anthem to hail a victory of public opinion over official insensibility. For such a victory it undoubtedly was. From the start the ministers had been confident that parliament would acknowledge that they were right and the people wrong, as if the House preferred to be at variance with the country rather than with them. In the middle of February Lord Liverpool spoke of government notions "gaining ground," three weeks later there was talk of a majority of twenty, and on the morning of the contest the Treasury checked its canvass figures and predicted one of forty.¹ The final result made fun of these forecasts. Far from swinging in the ministers' favour the House had been coming to terms with the sentiment it had been told to ignore. About 80 government supporters crossed the floor to swell the 150-160 strong regular opposition, and possibly as many went away or never turned up.² Castlereagh in his report to the Prince Regent spoke of "some going against, whose support had been calculated upon" and "numbers ... going away", which suggests that it was the abstentions which caught the government by surprise and were mainly responsible for converting the prog-

1 Liverpool, ii. 255; Cresvy's Life and Times (ed. John Gore), p.100; George IV, ii. 160.

2 About 150 members remain after voters, pairs and members with leave of absence have been accounted for. When the House was called over on 8 March 48 were excused attendance, but this number was almost certainly substantially increased when defaulters were ordered to attend on 11 March and again on 13 March. It is worth noting that 33 members who supported the government over the army estimates on either 6 or 8 March did not vote at all on the property tax.

nosticated majority of 40 into a minority almost as large.¹ Admittedly, not all of the abstainers were acting out of displeasure. A handful of Irish members, as Peel thought they would, balked at passing a tax which their countrymen would never pay, even though such reservations made the Union something of a mockery.² Nonetheless, the Times was still right. The House of Commons had "felt with the feelings of the country."³ When the majority sported twice as many county members as the minority it certainly looked like it.

Whether or not the government had learnt a lesson remained to be seen. As always, public feeling on an issue had proved to be muddle-headed, short-sighted and ill-informed. Apart from a necessary and often quite timid invocation against the property tax many petitions gave heart and voice to other more pertinent complaints like parochial taxation, the laws against distilling and even the duty on hair powder. Many too took the government to task for a breach of faith, which was utter nonsense; a year before when no one knew what Napoleon's next move was going to be, the ministers had been very careful not to promise an end to the tax after twelve months.⁴ Moreover, feeling against the "damnable impost" may have been genuine enough, but the Whigs had coaxed and marshalled it to suit themselves. As Castlereagh was quick to point out nearly a third of the petitions were from Devonshire and the metropolis because there each parish had produced its own, and out of eighty odd counties in Great Britain only nineteen had been called together in meetings regularly convened by the county sheriffs.

1 George IV, II. 160.

2 Peel to Gregory, 2 March 1816, Add. MSS. 40290, f.116. The letter is partly printed in Peel, I.212. See also Hansard, 1st ser., xxxiii. 198-9.

3 The Times, 19 March 1816.

4 e.g. Hansard, 1st ser., xxi. 238.

If opinion could be managed in this way to produce desirable results, it did not mean much, it did not represent "the unbiassed and collected sense of the people."¹ Yet parliament had had the perspicacity to distinguish an honest protest behind the balderdash and ballyhoo, and the ministers had not. Here if nowhere else there was food for thought.

The opposition had won a skirmish rather than carried an assault. Whatever the big talk at Brooks's concerning arrangements for a Whig administration,² the vote on the property tax had never been a vote of confidence, and though parliament and the Cabinet had not seen eye to eye on policy, in those days no one construed such a difference into a censure. There was no need for the ministers to resign, and in obedience to constitutional proprieties they did not contemplate it for a moment. Yet while defeat of the men may not have mattered, defeat of the measure did. It was not a setback soon got over by sweet talk and smart accountancy but a misfortune which dogged the ministers for the rest of the session and long after that. For a start the loss of the tax made a shambles of their financial plans for the immediate future. Keeping in mind the extra if temporary expense which would follow the war, they had counted on it providing £12,000,000 over a two year period. Now part of the sum at least had to be borrowed whether the economy could stand it or not. As Castlereagh ruefully remarked, what with the Bank advance and the surplus grants carried over from 1815, this left the government with £12,000,000 of "clear revenue" to meet an expenditure of £30,000,000. Even supposing spending was cut

1 Ibid., xxxiii. 444-5.

2 Arthur Aspinall, Lord Brougham and the Whig Party, p.61.

by a third a year later there would still "exist a serious deficiency of means to meet the charge."¹

An easy way out of the quandary did not exist. The ministers continued to insist upon the inviolability of the sinking fund, they were reluctant to apply to the money market for help, and they had no intention of playing the fool with parliament and the country by suggesting new taxes in lieu of that lost.² Once again the Bank came to the rescue. After earnest consultations with the Treasury throughout April, the directors agreed to lay before the proprietors a proposal for a loan of £3,000,000 at a modest 3 per cent in return for a substantial increase of capital; and with Bank stock paying hefty dividends time out of mind the proprietary Court offered a ready acquiescence.³ Indeed, every party stood to gain from the bargain: the proprietors got a chance of gilt-edged investment, the government got money on the cheap, and the public saw with satisfaction its bankers expand their capital to keep pace with increasing credit issues.⁴ Of course the amount of the loan was a paltry sum against the produce of the property tax, more so when a further £2,700,000 of revenue was written off with the dropping of the war excise on malt. But by really scraping the barrel the government was able to make up the difference. Enough Exchequer bills were to be retired to make a fresh issue feasible, unclaimed dividends on public stock held by the Bank were appropriated, the Exchequer was raided for several small balances of bygone grants, and Vansittart thanked his lucky stars to find that £3,000,000 was

1 George IV, ii. 160.

2 See Vansittart's declaration to this effect, 25 March 1816, Hansard, 1st ser., xxxiii. 553-4.

3 Sir John Clapham, The Bank of England, ii. 55-7. For the precise terms of the proposition see CJ, lxxi. 396.

4 Hansard, 1st ser., xxiv. 823-5.

a gross under-estimate of the 1815 surplus.¹

The budget may have balanced, out of the ways and means only the issue of Exchequer bills may have pressed on the money market and the exchanges, but in the long run makeshift finance like this was bound to cause disquiet. Had there been the taxes to support it, a policy of debt redemption such as the government clung to would have been unexceptionable. As it was, the theory of the sinking fund demanded a real surplus, and to sell Exchequer and Treasury bills to redeem funded debt just to fund them a year or two later was a conjuring act which in the end everyone could see through. Even so, the ministers hardly deserved the opprobrium heaped on them then and since for "cowardly public finance."² As Lord Grenville, putting himself in their shoes, said: "the distress of the Exchequer arises from an Expenditure of Debt & Establishment which can only be defrayed by taxation so enormous that in the evasions & retrenchments it produces, it defeats itself."³ Parliament was too intimidated to allow the war taxes to remain, yet the proper operation of the sinking fund was impossible without them; and it seemed by far the lesser evil to borrow to tide over a difficult period than assault the public credit. After all, distress was seen as the direct result of the war, a temporary phenomenon at most; and the huge war establishment was just as inevitable. As trade picked up, as the army and navy were reduced, the situation would right itself by an increasing revenue and a decreasing expenditure. Grenville had a short answer for the government's critics and it applies equally well to those who

1 Ibid., 833-4.

2 The phrase is Clapham's. Clapham, ii. 64.

3 Lord Grenville to Charles Williams-Wynn, 23 December 1816, Coed-y-maen MSS.

have imitated them: "Tierney & those who talk with him," he told his brother in successive letters, "would I think do well to remember that they might very suddenly be called upon, & by more than one event, to act in the very same situation in which they are now inveighing against poor Van's helplessness The whole question is not what we could wish to do, but what we can do."¹

Unfortunately, politicians are expected to achieve more than the possible. The ministers played along with the country by giving up taxes and conscientiously tended the sinking fund, but what commendation came from the monied interest for securing public credit and assisting the funds was spoilt by the continual reproaches of the rest. Large loans in peace looked bad because they made it seem that the nation was living beyond its means, and uneasiness at home and sneers abroad were the inevitable result. The Bank too used the government's importunities to explain away its dithering over the resumption of cash payments, not without reason since the advances assisted a credit expansion which in turn brought down the exchanges. Worst of all, as Vansittart warned parliament, the defeat of the property tax deprived the government of a chance to overhaul the atrociously ramshackle tax structure which was so closely connected with an atrociously anachronistic commercial system.² To make an honest job of fiscal and commercial reform was impossible when parliament had dedicated itself to the remission of taxation, for administration and legislature would work at cross-purposes, one intent on making method out of madness, the other on getting relief. Desperate for revenue, the govern-

1 Lord Grenville to Thomas Grenville, 11, 15 January 1817, Add. MSS. 41853, ff. 340, 342-3.

2 Hansard, 1st ser., xxii. 1127-8.

ment contented itself with squeezing as much as possible from the hotchpotch of duties by thoroughly checking the apparatus of collection and management. In 1817 a commission was set up "to inquire into the existing Regulations for the conduct of the Business" in the customs and excise "with a view to suggest such alterations therein, as may be considered necessary for facilitating the dispatch of Business, for affording accommodation to Trade, and for securing and improving the Revenue."¹

Of course following their hiding over the property tax the ministers' first thought was to save their majority not salvage a policy. What they wanted above all was a victory to shake off the stigma of defeat, a victory which would reassert their authority in the Commons, restore the waverers to their proper allegiance and place the whole matter in the context of an occasional defeat any government had to learn to endure. Unfortunately, the gap between wish and achievement was wider than it looked. A new cock-a-hoop opposition was not to be trounced all that easily, especially one which was more than prepared to follow up its success by having ready yet another "economical motion" at exactly the right moment. The Whigs' latest device concerned the Admiralty Office. In 1800 it had been decided to pay the two secretaries and their clerks a special wartime increment as compensation for their loss of sundry fees and perquisites under economical reform, but when the arrangement failed to find favour either inside or outside the navy an Order-in-Council of June 1815 authorised a return to the principle of fixed salaries applicable in every other department. Had the new salaries fallen short of the war charge, the matter would have ended then and there, but a pay increase

1 PP, 1820, vi. 561.

was involved which did not look at all well alongside the government's oft-repeated professions of irreproachable economy.¹ The opposition said as much when they asked for information a few days before the property tax came on,² and with the government sent reeling by parliament's slap in the face they were quick to see the advantage of pursuing the matter further before their adversaries could collect their senses and supporters. A day after the defeat of the property tax Methuen, a county member with firm opposition leanings, gave notice of motion for the following evening.³

The government's reaction showed that the ministers fully acknowledged the peril of their situation. The sum involved was a little extravagance to be sure - not £2,000 - but when peace would bring about a rundown of business, when living was cheaper and a fad for economy was in full swing it was too much to expect a sympathetic hearing from the House of Commons; and no administration could remain in office with honour after an act of government had been discredited - for such it was - and defeat had been inflicted in two consecutive divisions. The government, in short, was fighting for its life, and the ministers spurred themselves accordingly. No sooner had Methuen given notice than a Cabinet meeting was arranged for the following afternoon.⁴ At it the decision was made to drop the war excise on malt and the idea of new taxes to replace the property tax was finally abandoned.⁵ As far as the ministers were concerned it was time to climb off their high horse and humour parliament for a bit, and with fiscal relief all the rage and

1 Ibid., 1816, xiii. 167-80.

2 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxiii. 219-32.

3 The Times, 20 March 1816.

4 Ibid., 21 March 1816.

5 Peel, i. 216.

the hated malt tax past saving, nothing was lost by scrapping it as a boon for farmers and others feeling the pinch. No fine feelings held them back. Now that the property tax was gone, the money market would have to help the government out sooner or later, and whether the loan was for £6,000,000 or £8,000,000 made little difference in the circumstances. "There being little hope of carrying the war malt tax through," Castlereagh explained to the Prince Regent, "your Royal Highness's Ministers thought it better to add two millions to the amount of the loan, than to make perhaps an ineffectual attempt to force this tax upon the agriculturists and upon the poor, when the rich had deliver'd themselves from the property tax."¹ To concede something, enough to soften parliament's wrath without excessive loss of face, seemed the best way out of present difficulties.

Yet though the ministers shrewdly announced the welcome news shortly before the House set to on Methuen's crucial motion,² it did not save them from another grievous letdown. The opposition's attack which followed was an out and out charge of irresponsible conduct. The pay rise at the Admiralty Office, they declared, was a deplorable departure from "wholesome Regulation" and "an unnecessary expenditure of Public Money." "He called upon every member who heard him," brayed Methuen, "and who was anxious for the prosperity of the country, and who knew its distresses, to prove by their vote ... that the resources of the nation were not to be squandered away by the improvident prodigality of ministers."³ When loyalties were in limbo, Castlereagh did not dare meet the censure head on with a

¹ George IV, ii. 161.

² Hansard, 1st ser., xxxiii. 457.

³ Ibid., 478.

direct negative. Instead, he moved to read the other orders of the day, urging the House to let the matter rest until the estimate came before the committee of supply. This was a shuffling excuse at the best of times and the government was lucky indeed to get away with it. A long monologue from Castlereagh on reductions department by department never cut much ice because he had more progress to promise than report, and on the issue itself the general feeling was that the increase had been ill-timed and over-generous, however much paper-work the Admiralty now had to handle and however important it was for the Crown's servants to receive a decent remuneration. Hell-bent on economy, parliament was quite prepared to haggle over a sum as trivial as £1,500. Had Brougham not had the colossal impertinence to reprimand the Regent for "blind and profligate expenditure," a libel which naturally stunned the whole House, Castlereagh admitted the ending would probably have been "a decision unfavourable to the Government." As it was, the ministers scrambled home with a majority of 29, though the result was less an acquittal than a remand, for the committee of supply was certain to continue where the House had left off. The prospect was frightening to say the least. Brougham's extraordinary foux pas may have helped the government once but it would never happen a second time. And about a dozen friends had been in the opposition lobby in spite of it.¹

At this stage the Cabinet really believed the government's survival was going to be a near thing. In their view the Whigs had been thwarted more by good luck than good management, and to avert what seemed to be an inevitable defeat they waived

¹ Ibid., 476-513. See also accounts of the debate in George IV. ii. 161; Poel. i. 217.

the point of the salaries,¹ which meant that for the third time in three days their adversaries got their own way. No government could go on like this. Nor did the ministers fool themselves otherwise. For the next few days there were frenzied comings and goings. Arbuthnot of the Treasury was sent off post-haste to Brighton to put the Prince Regent fully in the picture, and a letter from Lord Liverpool probably preceded him, one which urged the Prince to return to Town immediately so that his ministers could confer with him daily and even hourly if need be.² The Duke of Rutland and Lord Lonsdale also heard from the Prime Minister. They had fifteen votes at their command and when the government hung by a thread every one was needed.³ Finally, the officeholders were ordered to attend en masse at Fife House, Lord Liverpool's place in Whitehall, to learn what was expected of them in the crisis.⁴ The next parliamentary question of importance would concern the navy estimates. The sea service, the charge of ships in commission, had already been provided for, but apart from that nothing, and there were rumours going around that the Whigs meant business when the rest of the estimates came up.⁵ Yet the conference at Fife House must have been more than the usual pep talk about regular attendance and support. Such a lecture would never have kept the party behind closed doors for over an hour one evening and for another two the afternoon following. Moreover, the Duke of York attended the second session which was something quite out of the ordinary.⁶ His presence in fact explained a

1 Parliament was told of this on 22 March. Hansard, 1st ser., xciii. 534.

2 Liverpool, ii. 270-1.

3 Lord Liverpool to the Duke of Rutland, Lord Lonsdale, 23 March 1816, Add. MSS. 38262, ff.323-6.

4 The Times, 26 March 1816.

5 Aspinall, Lord Brougham and the Whig Party, pp.66-7.

6 The Times, 26 March 1816.

lot. If the Commander-in-Chief was needed, almost certainly the army estimates were discussed, and if this was so, the navy estimates and the civil list must have been too, for the government had reason to fear parliament's animadversion on those just as much. The purpose of such a briefing was obvious. No doubt there were appeals for loyalty and a stricture or two, but the Cabinet's real concern was to reassure the rank and file that they had the situation in hand, that reductions were in progress and more were contemplated. They could be relied on to spread the news outside. When parties in the proper sense of the word did not exist, when none of the ministers headed a connexion in the old style, this was the best, perhaps the only way to pass the message on.

The talk around Town of an onslaught on the navy estimates turned out to be right. Nor did the opposition waste time in getting down to business. Hardly had the House been asked to refer them to the committee before Tierney was on his feet running through the figures in fine style; and by an astonishing oversight his attack really caught the government napping. "Facts, positive and clear facts" he demanded of his opponents, but when Castlereagh called Croker of the Admiralty to his side he found that the papers giving them had been left behind. For a moment or two the government's fate hung in the balance. At all costs Tierney had to be answered, for the time had come to stop the rot or resign and on the face of it his argument was a good one which had the House all ears. When he said that in the year to come the administration was going to cost £20,000 more than in the last year of war he was not talking nonsense. The estimates read exactly the same. Thus while Warrender, one of the civil Lords, extemporised as best he could to stall off a division, a whip raced round to the Admiralty Office for the memorandum on which so much depended. Croker

only had to read it out to make a fool of Tierney and the whole opposition appear disingenuous and dissembling. The vote for the sea service, he explained, carried the charge of ships in commission, the "establishment estimate" that of ships in ordinary, and in peace when most of the fleet was laid up the latter was bound to be as large as the other was small. Going back a century he showed it to be invariably true. This statement "changed the face of the House in a moment." Quite caught out by their own chicanery the opposition tried to salvage some self-respect by moving an adjournment. It availed them nothing. The House did not even bother to divide.¹

This success brought the crisis to an end. The estimates caused the government no further trouble and a week later they were safely through the committee of supply. The majorities which attended them "have put us all in Spirits," Peel wrote gleefully,² and indeed three years were to pass before parliament and his colleagues were again at loggerheads. What needed showing had been shown, that the country gentlemen were not out to destroy the government, only to direct it if the situation seemed to demand as much. When the ministers were manifestly in the right, as they had been this time, their loyalty could never be placed in question. But it had not always been so. Over the property tax parliament chose to relieve the people before the money market when the government would have done the opposite. Over the Admiralty salaries what one felt was a fair and reasonable remuneration the other called exorbitant. The difference was resolved in the only way it could have been, by the Cabinet acknowledging that parliament knew better than they

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xciii. 567-91; Croker, 1. 80-5.

2 Peel to Lord Whitworth, 30 March 1816, Add. MSS. 40290, f.182.

did. To have resigned would have been looked upon as unnecessary and even irresponsible. Inevitably the opposition sought to provoke them into it by all manner of ridicule, but since no censure or vote of no-confidence had been carried it was perfectly proper to treat these efforts with disdain. As for the country gentlemen, they could see no dishonour in staying. Any act which needlessly landed the country with the nuisance of a political interregnum would have earned their reprobation, especially one which brought the suspect Whigs to power, and they could not care less about the contradictions and inconsistencies of government policy if they meant that the Cabinet fell in with their wishes. It was these members, more prejudiced than pragmatic, who mattered most. No administration in its right mind deliberately ran foul of over half the Commons, even one faced by an opposition of low repute. In 1816 there was a crisis because the ministers forgot to keep in touch. Provided the lesson was remembered, it was scarcely possible that they could go far wrong in the future.

"We must unavoidably hear much of Ireland in our remaining discussions," a member prognosticated shortly after the Easter recess.¹ In a way it was saying the obvious. Invariably Irish business was shelved until the end of the session when a predominantly British parliament had finished with predominantly British concerns and the summer migration from Town to Country had begun. On the other hand, in 1816 the House had reason to expect a larger helping than usual of what most parliamentarians would have called Irish stodge; there had not been a full-scale debate on Ireland for years, the last time the question of Catholic disabilities had been gone into thoroughly was 1813, and

1 Colchester, ii. 574.

as a prelude to fiscal as well as political union parliament had already pledged itself to look at Irish finances.¹ In the event, nearly all came to pass. At the end of February Sir John Newport, a prominent Irish Whig, promised to ask for a general enquiry if no one else would;² a week or so later he tabled a motion and undaunted by successive postponements achieved a hearing when the House resumed after the Easter holidays; in May legislation was introduced to bring the financial departments in Ireland under the control and supervision of the Treasury in London. Only with respect to Catholic emancipation could the politicians have been accused of shirking the problems of "unhappy Hibernia," at least from the point of view of giving them some consideration. When Grattan raised the question he put off present discussion and merely tried to pledge parliament to a full-dress debate early in the next session. A hopeless solo effort by Parnell which annoyed the whole House by its impudence was the limit of positive action.

Here, though, there was a hint of everyone's feelings on the subject and on that of Ireland generally. Both bored the legislature to tears, and the boredom sprang mainly from despair. "If /Ireland/ appears under a religious form, it is frightful, and civil form it has none," wrote a backbencher.³ It was the sort of remark which was common change. At Westminster, and even outside, Catholic emancipation as an issue was more dead than alive. The government would do nothing about it because the ministers themselves could not see eye to eye, and right from the start neutrality had been adopted as the formula to keep them together, though at the same time each was free to canvass his views as a member of parliament. Mostly the initia-

1 CJ, lxx. 433-4.

2 Hansard, 1st ser., xcvi. 932.

3 Colchester, ii. 574.

tive came from the opposition. The opportunity of pressing a question when the government whips were off and provoking public disagreement among the ministers was too good to miss; and it made a heartening show of solidarity besides for the erring Grenvilles were sure to forget old grudges and join the main body for the occasion. However, in 1816 even to the Whigs another fling seemed hardly worth the trouble. Any measure had to run the House of Commons under heavy fire, and even if it got through intact, which was not impossible after the near success of 1813, the peers, notoriously Protestant, would soon see it done to death. Equally discouraging was the strength of anti-Catholic sentiment in the country. With the King so poorly an election was on the cards, and among the opposition there were too many with memories of "No Popery" contests not to think twice of what they were about. But above all, they could not be sure of moral support from the Irish Catholics. Opinion in Ireland was divided over whether or not securities should accompany emancipation, especially the proposal to give the Crown power to veto the appointment of Irish Catholic bishops. The extremists led by O'Connell and the clergy were against the veto while the moderates led by the Catholic nobility were prepared to accept such a deal in order to secure the manifold blessings of civil equality. Hitherto, the Whigs had been vetoists, which put them at odds with O'Connell and other firebrands and in the impossible position of urging upon Ireland what a good part regarded as a betrayal of religion and national honour. Little wonder therefore that Grattan settled for a milk and water motion. Parnell found out for himself that his friends would stand for no more. Not a dozen of them gave him the courtesy of attendance when he brought a number of resolutions forward and not one intervened on his behalf when Castlereagh, himself an emancipationist, told him off soundly for being mule-

headed and irresponsible.¹ Until the Irish Catholics set their house in order and Protestant ardour in Great Britain cooled off, the Whigs thought it wisest to peddle the issue as little as possible.

Emancipation, of course, was largely an Irish problem, and no doubt the perennial debate for and against it helps explain the feeling parliament had of being cated with Irish business. On the other hand, if the House was never allowed to forget the sister kingdom over the sea, as Peel said, it did not stop "many an honest Englishman" knowing "about as much of the state of Ireland as he does of the state of Kamshatka."² The ignorance came from stolid unconcern. By now murder, moonshine and the occasional famine there were looked upon as nothing out of the ordinary, as inevitable happenings in a barely civilised society. "In truth," Lord Liverpool once wrote, "Ireland is a political phenomenon, not influenced by the same feelings as appear to affect mankind in other countries."³ Only when Great Britain herself was threatened by Irish troubles did parliament look long and hard at her sorry state. Just as the nightmare of a French invasion brought about union so fears of civil war got emancipation through twenty-eight years later. In 1816 there was nothing half as disturbing. Indeed, to most it must have seemed that the country had taken a distinct turn for the better. The disbandment in 1814 of the Catholic Board, a representative body in fact if not law, had dealt the organised movement for emancipation a crushing blow, and though the Insurrection Act giving magistrates summary powers of search and arrest was still in force here and there, no further

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xxiv. 1007-14; Peel to Lord Whitworth, 7 June 1816, Add. MSS. 40291, ff.72-3.

2 Peel, i. 211.

3 Liverpool, ii. 252.

counties had been proclaimed for some months. Not surprisingly then, Newport's motion for "a deliberate examination of the existing evils" attracted only a moderate attendance. If Ireland was quiet well and good, and if the country's condition was "distressing and afflicting" the Irish character and the Catholic religion were mostly to blame. There was nothing parliament could do about either. For those members who did turn up, no doubt one airing of the problem was enough. "Our division was not a very good one," Peel reported, "but it has had this effect that any future discussions in this Session on Irish affairs will lose much of their interest."¹

Economy was the one issue parliament was bent on, partly because it was the most comprehensible. While the complexities of the Irish and Catholic problems bewildered and dismayed everyone - even the government seemed bereft of bright ideas - the simple arithmetic of public expenditure was a subject in which most laid claim to some expertise. How much to spend was an uncomplicated battle of wits between the ministers and the House of Commons; and the most timid animal in the chamber, the country gentlemen on the hindmost bench, fancied he could smell out extravagance wherever it existed. The other main item of Irish business, the so-called consolidation of the exchequers, provided a perfect example. By the seventh article of the Act of Union Great Britain and Ireland undertook to contribute to the common purse in the proportion of fifteen to two, each country keeping its own revenue departments to raise its own taxes. This fiscal independence was not meant to last for ever, but only when the national debts of both were in roughly the same proportion could steps be taken to bring it to an end.

1 Peel to Lord Whitworth, 27 April 1816, Add. MSS. 40290, ff. 220-2.

In 1811 a select committee of the House of Commons noted that this point had been reached, and four years afterwards another recommended immediate action, though by then with the rapid increase of the Irish debt the proportion was more like thirteen to two. However, this technicality the House chose to ignore. In May 1816 in a series of resolutions it gave its formal consent to proceed.

Nothing like an administrative revolution was needed to bring about fiscal union, but as usual the "economical monomaniacs" nosed round until they found a molehill to make a mountain of. Ireland's finances were presided over by a Treasury Board of six and two secretaries besides, and as in Great Britain the servicing of the debt was in the charge of specially appointed commissioners. In the transfer of responsibilities which the government had in mind the British commissioners took over the Irish debt, a vice-treasurer replaced the Irish Treasury and two of those dispossessed were added to the Board in London. Eight places were done away with and only three erected in their stead. If the ministers were tempted to brag though, the wind was soon taken out of their sails. For the routine chore of counter-signing warrants the vice-treasurer was to receive a salary of £3,500 and a deputy to boot, and the country gentlemen aided and abetted by the opposition took a very dim view of it. They refused to be convinced that an office of trust and political reward, which was what the government made out it was, deserved that sort of munificence, and though the deputy was saved by passing a clause permitting the principal a parliamentary seat, on the salary the ministers were beaten down to £2,000.¹ The House was quite ready to allow the Crown a moderate influence, even if the

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xciv. 588-617, 1045-8, 1109-22, 1128-9, 1225-30.

strict letter of Queen Anne's law against new placemen was transgressed in the process. But it was emphatic, now more than ever, that the pay of public office had to be commensurate with its duties.

The matter was of no great moment, but nevertheless the reverse rankled. Knowing full well that when it came to economy the House would never be gainsaid, the ministers had done their best to satisfy its fastidiousness on questions of this sort ever since the difficult days before the Easter recess. Shortly after the defeat of the property tax £318,000 had been lopped off the army, navy and ordnance estimates to keep parliament sweet,¹ while behind the scenes the Treasury had gone to work with a will, ordering reductions in the departments and setting up commissions to inquire into civil list expenditure and offices of wartime creation.² Such overt zeal, overt because the news of these doings soon got around, had paid off handsomely. Satisfied that the government was not playing them false, the country gentlemen had spoilt the opposition's game from then on. Within the space of a month motions deploring the enormous peace establishment, the charge of public offices and the retention of three secretaries of state had all been baffled by their willingness to wait and see.

Not only did the Treasury's hard work help soften parliament's dangerous mood. It also provided plenty of information which the ministers could parade in refutation when-

- 1 See Lord Palmerston's memorandum in Add. MSS. 48429, f.104 and Paper supplementary to the Ordinance Estimates, 29 March 1816, in PP, 1816, xii. 91-3. In addition, £40,000 was saved on the navy extraordinaries and a further £3,000 on Admiralty salaries.
- 2 Huskisson to Canning, 20 April 1816, Canning MSS. A copy of the Treasury minute of 5 April appointing the commission into offices created since 1793 is found in PP, 1816, xiii. 97. According to Lord Binning the Treasury had circularised the departments concerning reductions before this. Hansard, 1st ser., xxxiv. 321. The reports submitted by the Treasury commission on eighteen offices and departments are printed in PP, 1817, xv. 11-21.

over the Whigs tried to vilify them for unfeeling extravagance. Never was this shown better than over the civil list. Here the problem was an ever-recurring deficit of income, the result of a bad bargain made by George III at the time of his accession. For by exchanging most of his grandfather's revenues for a fixed parliamentary grant, the King had unknowingly signed away one of the last vestiges of the Crown's independent power, a civil list supervised by the sovereign and by him alone. "To an Expenditure necessarily increasing," a committee of the House of Commons explained in 1815, "a fixed Income was applied, and though that Income was at different times augmented, it was never increased beyond an Amount sufficient to meet the Expenditure at the time the Augmentation was made" As a result a monarch of simple tastes was dogged by debt for the whole of his reign. The more the King kept living beyond his means, the more parliament was called on to help him out, and in the circumstances it was not long before a balance sheet accompanied the royal message as a matter of course. The opposition set the precedent by working some accounts out of Lord North in 1770, but after the turn of the century the practice began to be regularised. An act of 1804 insisted that accounts should be presented forthwith if any class of the civil list was in arrears for more than two quarters, and one of 1812 the same immediately the overall deficit exceeded the average of the past eight years. For a while the Crown managed to put a stop to the snooping by using its remaining hereditary revenues to pay its way, but though war boosted their yield, after 1812 even they no longer sufficed and once again parliament had the whip hand. When the House of Commons came to consider the civil list in 1816 the accounts of "the King's own" made fairly familiar reading.¹

1 Report on the Civil List, PP, 1814-15, iii. 91-175.

Of course a financial statement told so much and no more, for it said nothing definite about how debt had been incurred or who was to blame. Here, however, Burke's reforms had done parliament an inestimable service. That cleansing of the Augean stable, as the Whigs liked to regard it, had irrevocably established the principle of casual interference, and in obedience to it six committees sat above stairs from 1802-15, poring over the accounts and any other evidence the Crown was gracious enough to give them. Still, though they laboured hard, their inability to save their sovereign from embarrassment showed what little they could really do. Always parliament was handicapped by its own loathness to pry too far in defiance of the much-venerated notion that the civil list was the King's exclusive property. While only part of the list was for the maintenance of the royal state, as late as 1815 when Tlexney had the nerve to ask for a committee with power to send for persons, papers and records, the usual ministerial protest against "violating the delicacy and deference due to the Crown" brought him to defeat.¹ Thus a commission such as the Treasury appointed in 1816 could carry its researches much further than any committee of the House. The private nature of the inquiry set the Crown at ease and even compelled it to co-operate when the choice lay between the two, which was precisely what happened in 1816. By then the Prince Regent was sick to death of being called to account, while his ministers were certain he would be, and purely to save his feelings they suggested a small commission under Treasury auspices. For a time there was a tussle, but when they pointed out that parliament would otherwise interfere whether he liked it or not, he swallowed his

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xxx. 616-44.

pride and gave his permission.¹ Not often did the ministers have the run of the Household, and, propriety or no, they made the most of it. After questioning officials the House dared not send for, after checking accounts the House was never allowed to see, the government had inside information no parliamentary committee was ever likely to get.

The main task the Treasury set its three-man commission was to settle a new estimate for the civil list, one that would spare the government the nuisance and the Crown the embarrassment of another application to parliament for the rest of the reign. Admittedly, a select committee of the House of Commons had already arrived at a figure, but that was no reason for the ministers not to go one better if they possibly could. Probably parliament expected as much anyway. The ministers had taken a fresh look at all their other estimates immediately after the defeat of the property tax, and presumably no exception was to be made of the civil list. Certainly, when the commissioners - Charles Long, Huskisson and Arbuthnot - were done, they handed in a report of exemplary ruthlessness. The fourth class (the allocation for the Household departments) was marked down £20,000 and the contingent or occasional payments £90,000, both categories including charges of a civil as well as of a personal nature. With the savings in the third class (payments to the diplomatic service) which the Foreign Office found itself able to recommend, the reduction was little short of £140,000 altogether.² That this much could be gleaned after a parliamentary committee had been over the ground underlined the ineffectiveness of parliamentary as opposed to official inquiry, even if the largest reduction had to be discounted as following from a

1 Huskisson to Canning, 20 April 1816, Canning MSS.

2 PP, 1816, xlii. 52-3.

state of peace and not from any administrative resourcefulness.

Despite the good work, the question of the civil list still kept the government in fear and trembling. "Upon this subject," Huskisson gloomily reported to Canning, "We are forewarned not to expect the support of many who are generally our friends in the House; and out of doors public opinion is still more decidedly against us."¹ In the past there had frequently been glimpses of parliament's displeasure at extravagance in high places, most notably over the Brighton showpiece, but this time there was reason to fear that the members would feel even less inhibited. As Liverpool and two colleagues thought it their duty to warn the Regent: "... no subject is viewed with more jealousy and suspicion than the personal expenses of the Sovereign or his representative at a time when most of the landed gentlemen of the country are obliged to submit to losses & privations as well as to retrenchment."² Unhappily, the latest accounts were least likely to keep this feeling at bay. Those for the April quarter showed a deficit of £140,000, which brought the total debt outstanding to over £400,000; and to complete the government's discomfiture the whole of it had been incurred within a year because in June 1815 when the civil list had been in arrears to the tune of £534,000 parliament had obliged the Crown to the full amount.³ For this state of affairs the ministers would bravely take the consequences, but no one needed to be told that the real culprit was one much greater than they. George III's parsimony still stuck in the nation's mind, and his high-living son paid dearly for the memory. Yet really the country was far too ready to give the Regent a dressing-down when it came to the matter of the

1 20 April 1816, Canning MSS.

2 George IV, ii. 158.

3 See the accounts in PP, 1814-15, iii.158, x. 171; 1816, xiii. 15, 41.

monarchy's expense. If the Crown had run up so large a debt in the space of twelve months, the discrepancy between the income parliament had seen fit to grant and an expenditure no one could anticipate adequately explained it. As soon as it became more expensive to live, govern or diplomatically, the civil list was bound to feel the pinch, and with the war, one way and another, all three had happened. Throughout the reign indeed the story had been the same, an indigent Crown living hand to mouth on crumbs from parliament's table. Blind because it suited it, the nation would never see the fault in its own habitual stinginess. Time and time again any deficit occurring was attributed to the Crown's iniquity, under the father to the increase of its jobbery, under the son to the voluptuousness of its existence.

Typically, a small item concerning Brighton worried the ministers most this time. The Pavilion being a royal residence not a royal palace was never the property of the Crown, but early in 1816, having run out of private funds, the Prince Regent applied for Crown money to continue the building and furnishing. Discreetly, the Treasury chose to act on what it called the "just and reasonable" principle that wherever the Crown chose to reside there the trappings of royalty should be provided at the public expense, and not wishing to add to the civil list debt a meeting of the Board ordered £70,000 to be made over from the hereditary revenues with the proviso that furnishings should remain the property of the Crown.¹ Needless to say, serious objections could scarcely be avoided. Strictly speaking, public money was being put to private purposes, and that which was used - the revenue from the Admiralty droits - was a fund which the government habitually drew upon when it

1 Copy of Treasury Minute, 23 February 1816, *ibid.*, 1816, xiii. 63.

wanted to discharge the civil list debt without recourse to parliament. Hence there was a great and very real danger that a notion would go abroad that the Crown bargained on the House of Commons paying its debts come what may, a notion perhaps vaguely formed already, for by a regrettable oversight no formal message had been sent in acknowledgment of the previous year's settlement. Nor was this the only questionable part. A transaction under the counter such as this was also made nonsense of any estimates the Crown saw fit to produce in respect of the civil list; and if parliament could vote so much while the Crown with the ministers' connivance spent more on the side, the Commons' overlordship of financial concerns was far short of what it ought to be. Either objection, then, could have landed the government in an ocean of trouble. It was not just that parliament wanted frugality in the royal household as much as anywhere else; the dignity of the sovereign had equally to be protected from the humiliation of frequent parliamentary solicitation. With good reason every administration feared the consequences of bringing "the King's own" into public discussion because a charge of less-majesty was an inevitable accompaniment to the charge of misgovernment. Whenever the Crown made application for the nation's charity the Commons no less than the Court felt an irreparable insult, though how the former could satisfy its economical urgings without detracting from the royal state remained an impossible contradiction.

As it was, on this occasion the ministers never put a foot wrong. The difficulties at the start of the session may have shaken their ego, but seemingly out of trial and tribulation came a sharpened political cunning. The House of Commons learnt the amount of the civil list debt on 26 March. Almost in the same breath Castlereagh divulged that the hereditary

revenues would pay it and that to prevent a recurrence the estimates would be revised and a bill introduced to carry out the recommendations of the last committee. As was only to be expected, Tierney professed himself dissatisfied, and there and then promised to propose a committee of inquiry, again one not hamstrung by being without the power to send for persons, papers and records.¹ Such a committee had no precedent. Hitherto, the House had had to be content with whatever information the government saw fit to give it, but if Tierney was allowed to have his way, that security would go by the board and parliament's invasion of the royal privacy would be virtually complete. The very idea, of course, made the Prince Regent furious. Nor were the ministers much happier. For while parliament had persistently held the Treasury responsible for civil list expenditure, the Household departments had just as persistently resisted Treasury control, and Lord Liverpool and Vansittart had no desire to be blamed for others' mistakes more than they could help. Somehow the ground had to be cut from under the opposition's feet, preferably by satisfying the House that a select committee would be an unnecessary impertinence. But that meant forestalling Tierney, and on 10 April he had entered his motion in the order-book for 6 May. Hastily Castlereagh reserved 3 May on the government's behalf.² On a motion asking for leave to bring in a civil list bill he could say all that needed to be said.

When the day arrived the ministers had left nothing to chance. They had the Prince Regent's word that building at Brighton would be brought to a standstill,³ they had an estimate

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xciii. 597-8.

2 Ibid., 1133; The Times, 25 April 1816.

3 See the correspondence in George IV, ii. 158-9; Sir Benjamin Bloomfield to Lord Liverpool, Lord Liverpool to Sir Benjamin Bloomfield, 16 March 1816, Add MSS. 38262, ff. 317-20.

to present which undercut parliament's by £139,000, and they had a bill ready based on a report the House had previously commended. To dish the Whigs even a little skulduggery was not amiss. A comprehensive view of the Crown's resources necessarily included both the hereditary revenues and the civil list, and though the opposition asked for accounts of the Admiralty and other droits a month in advance, the government produced nothing until after Castlereagh had spoken. This left Tierney with a weekend to do the essential homework on his motion. Lest the House should feel itself slighted - there was no chance of getting the papers printed in time - Castlereagh called representatives of the country gentlemen round to his home to put them fully in the picture.¹ One last precaution was taken, a whip sent out to official members.² Even when the government's existence was at stake apparently, politicians were still unprofessional enough to need a reminder. Foreseeably, Tierney's request for a committee was turned down out of hand. When a division was called for, only opposition stalwarts were found to favour the idea and those on the government side outnumbered them nearly two to one. As Castlereagh pointed out, with five reports on civil list expenditure since 1802 and other accounts and papers besides, the House had plenty of information. If it wanted more, it only had to address the Crown in the usual way without disparagement of the royal dignity. Over Brighton the ministers also escaped the drubbing they had feared. Tierney insisted that the droits should pay the Crown's debts before all else, and later on he tried to make it mandatory by inserting a clause in the preamble of the government's bill. Had there been a second application for

1 Tierney mentioned the meeting in his speech. See Hansard, 1st ser., xxxiv. 256.

2 Castlereagh refers to it in a letter to Peel, 8 May 1816, Add. MSS. 40181, f. 202.

parliament's largesse in consecutive years the House would have certainly taken a different view of the matter. Fortunately the droits, thanks mainly to prize money, afforded enough to pay debts public as well as private. If any doubt existed over the transaction, the ministers got the benefit of it.¹

The Whigs in large measure were beaten by their own folly. Far too often, as if afraid to lose the scent they had stumbled on, they forgot that parliament's mania for cheap government had its limits. Sometimes they seemed to err on the side of stinginess, to set too low a price on public service by denying responsibility a proper reward. At others - and their attack on Lord Bathurst's secretaryship was an example - they appeared to throw efficient government to the winds. Now, over the civil list, they prepared to trespass on one of the Crown's most jealously guarded preserves. To parliament's way of thinking this was carrying economy too far. If the Whigs saw the issue as a short cut to popularity and even power, they should never have risked offending these finer feelings for good government and the royal estate. Not that they stood to win otherwise. As long as the ministers made an honest job of retrenchment, most of their thunder was stolen anyhow.

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xciv. 185-206, 255-99, 789-806.

THE PEOPLE DELUDED

The summer which members of parliament and the rest of high society went home to enjoy was one of the worst in living memory. Throughout July and August the thermometer remained anchored in the fifties and sixties, and a long sequence of grey days and drizzle was relieved only by torrential downpours and hailstorms. Everyone's first thoughts were for the harvest. "A cold backward spring" had already stunted the young grain and a wet summer "with a singular absence of solar heat" on top of it seemed catastrophic.¹ When the harvest failed the whole community felt the consequences; parochial taxation had to succour a starving populace, hungry people posed a threat to social order and emergency imports played havoc with the exchanges and the balance of trade. Europe moreover had fared no better than Great Britain weathervise, so that the danger this time was magnified by an international shortage. Anticipating a calamity, the corn wholesalers began to conserve their stocks while the fields were still green. In the maritime counties which were fairly representative of England and Wales, the average price of wheat shot up from 65s. to 80s. a quarter in May alone, and though there was a slight easing in June and July, it was again that high in the middle of August.² It was a fair bet that by the time

- 1 See the meteorological figures and descriptions in the Annual Register, 1816, pp.112-13, 355; Gentleman's Magazine, 1816, 11, pp.94, 173, 190, 194; Thomas Tooke, Thoughts and Details on the High and Low Prices of the Last Thirty Years, 111, p.78.
- 2 PP, 1821, ix. 381-2.

the nation's representatives began to retrace their steps of the summer "the condition of England" would be the most pressing problem awaiting them.

Granted a lean year was in prospect, the government's attitude on the face of it was puzzling to say the least. While the rest of the nation was indulging in morbid reflections on the upward price of corn, the government was using evidence of its own to arrive at a happier, altogether different evaluation. The point was that the ministers measured the economy's ups and downs in rough and ready fashion using the revenue returns, the excise and the assessed taxes in particular being reckoned "the true Criteria of Internal Prosperity." If they were down in any one quarter the assumption followed that people were less well off in terms of what they consumed and what they owned, but after keeping a close eye on the figures coming in during the October quarter, Lord Liverpool came to the conclusion that the situation was not as bad as most were making out. At the beginning of September he bade Lord Sidmouth be of good cheer and what he said then held good later on when the quarterly account was finally drawn up:

The Revenue looks better. The Excise (which is the most material Branch) good, the Customs still very low, but the great falling off is in the Port of London, which is a proof that it does not arise from Smuggling or diminished Consumption, but from want of Speculation growing out of Want of Confidence. We may trust therefore that this Evil will in a short Time be removed.

If this was a comfort, so was the state of the money market.

In the same letter the Prime Minister went on to say: "Money

- 1 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 3 September 1816, Sidmouth MSS.; Lord Liverpool to Lord Castlereagh, 11 October 1816, Castlereagh MSS., xxx.514-17. The second letter is printed with mistakes in Liverpool, ii. 281-2.

is in Abundance, and I have no doubt that in a few Months the Market will be glutted with Gold and Silver." Throughout the war a good part of the profits of economic growth had been funnelled into government loans, and when these suddenly ceased compensating opportunities proved hard to find. At home the sluggishness of trade and industry was discouraging, the canal boom was over and enclosure was a poor proposition in view of the distresses of agriculture. Abroad it was too early to say what the prospects were. Meanwhile Europe's straightened circumstances and exchanges consistently around or above par were bringing a tidal wave of treasure into the country. In February 1816 the Bank's bullion reserves totalled £4,600,000. Eighteen months later they were two and a half times as much.¹ From the government's point of view the best that could come of money in plenty was the return to prosperity of the landed interest. Distress invariably brought the country gentlemen to Westminster in an ugly frame of mind, over-finicky about public spending - which always bore the blame - and clamorous for the redress of their own grievances. Now for the first time since 1813 agriculture seemed on the verge of better things. It was not just that corn was going to be in short supply. An agriculture nourished on capital, as Great Britain's was, depended as much on easy credit as on a relatively high return, which meant low interest rates were no less important than good prices. What made 1816 so promising was that a momentary lull in investment was making money cheaper while the prospect of a bad harvest was making corn dearer. No farmer could ask more; and in view of parliament's recent poorishness no government could either.

1 Report on the Bank of England Charter, PP. 1831-2, vi.511-12.

Thus in Great Britain there was reason enough for complacency, not least it might be added because the labouring classes were protected from the full blast of distress by the fact that wages had fallen immeasurably less than prices since the war. But Great Britain was only part of the Kingdom. In Ireland Nature's waywardness could never be taken with the same equanimity. There a season in which the potato crop failed and the peat did not dry was the forerunner of certain starvation and misery, for living at subsistence level and dependent on a single crop the Irish peasant had tragically no escape. Remote though it may have seemed sometimes, the Irish administration was never insensible to this danger. Throughout the summer Peel and Gregory, his under-secretary, were in constant touch with the localities, and it was after the equinoctial gales had brought more rain at the beginning of October that they felt it incumbent on them to sound a note of warning to the government in London, Peel telling both his immediate superior, Lord Sidmouth, and the Prime Minister that nothing less than famine lay round the corner.¹ When a moment like this arrived there was not much the government could or would do. To have it feed half the population was asking the impossible. To hand out charity here and there would have the whole nation a-begging, besides teaching the people to turn to the state when they ought to rely rather on their own frugality and industry. Peel's social conscience was tender if anyone's was, but he was emphatic that it was far better to do too little than too much:

... the Government might in case of extreme necessity administer relief by direct interference, but if half the Population is

1 Peel to Lord Liverpool, 9 October 1816, Peel to Lord Sidmouth, 10 October 1816, Add. MSS. 40291, ff.186-7, 196-7.

in this state we cannot help trembling to think of the consequences of the first precedent. I must say, however, that if there were within the reach of the Government a number of persons actually starving, & without the hope of relief from other quarters, I would overleap every difficulty & buy food for them at the public expence. I would only do this under Circumstances of the extremest necessity, and I would do it even under those circumstances with every possible precaution, and with every effort to prevent its being known that the relief came from the hands of Government.¹

During the really bad weeks of famine in the spring and early summer, when the scanty supplies of the previous year remained un replenished by a new harvest, the government stuck faithfully to this policy of limited assistance. An act of parliament authorised a commission to keep an eye on the situation and to advance small sums but only where local subscriptions were underway. Self-help was to be rewarded not displaced by state charity. As it was, an attempt to distribute seed oats in the famine area showed that anything more grandiose was beyond the government's capabilities: three out of every four shiploads arrived in a rotten condition thanks to double-dealing on the part of the suppliers and slapdash supervision by the government agents. In condition and disposition alike the government was far from ready to take a generous view of its social responsibilities. Altogether the relief operation probably cost Dublin Castle a little over £40,000.²

Even so, Whitehall's effort was pigmy in comparison. In Ireland the state had to interfere more than it liked because of the colossal nature of the problem and because absenteeism hampered private initiative, but in Great Britain

1 Peel to Lord Whitworth, 8 March 1817, *ibid.*, 40292, ff.174-8. The letter is printed with mistakes in *Peel*, 1.241-2.

2 *Peel*, 1.244-5; Norman Gash, *Mr Secretary Peel*, pp.219-24. According to the public accounts £40,015 was advanced to the commissioners in charge of famine relief. *PP*, 1818, xii.117.

the old-fashioned idea that the poor should look to the parish was still very much in evidence. One parliamentary committee of the period referred to an "insuperable" difficulty if poor relief became a national responsibility, "the impossibility of devising any adequate means to check the demands upon such a fund, when every excess in parochial disbursements would be merged in the general expenditure of the empire." An excessive beneficence, it was felt, by diminishing the "natural impulse by which men are instigated to industry and good conduct" would be the ruination of the poor, and under the old system the rate-payers at least got best value for their money since they had a say in its spending.¹ At this particular moment the country was in the grip of economic forces before which the government was powerless. The ministers made a frank confession of their impotence when parliament reassembled in January 1817. "These evils upon this Country," they had the Prince Regent declare, "... are of a nature not to admit of an immediate remedy."² Lord Liverpool was clear in his own mind that the trouble arose "from the unavoidable Circumstances which grow out of a Change from a state of Expensive War to Peace,"³ and an article in The Quarterly Review, incidentally one he admired greatly,⁴ furnished an over-elaborate explanation:

[Peace] was a great and sudden change, and such a change, however desirable, however necessary, however beneficial at last, could not occur without much immediate inconvenience. It was not our military departments alone which were upon the war

1 Report on the Poor Laws, PP, 1817, vi.4, 11.

2 CJ, lxxi.4.

3 Lord Liverpool to Lord Redesdale, 5 September 1816, Gloucester-Record Office, D2002, C23.

4 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 17 November 1816, Sidmouth MSS.

establishment, it was every branch of trade, and every kind of industry which was in any way connected with the war or influenced by it. The ordnance, for instance, employed the foundries, the gunsmiths, &c. &c. these manufactories called upon the iron and brass works, and the furnaces kept the colliers in activity: thus it was in every part of the great political machine, (the most complicated that ever existed,) wheel within wheel, and when one was checked, the obstruction was felt through all. The whole annual war expenditure to the amount of not less than forty millions was at once withdrawn from circulation. But public expenditure is like the fountain-tree in the Indian paradise, which diffuses in fertilizing streams the vapours which it was created to collect and condense for the purpose of more beneficially returning and distributing them. A vacuum was inevitably produced by this sudden diminution, and the general dislocation which ensued may not unaptly be compared to the settling of the ice upon a wide sheet of water: explosions are made and convulsions are seen on all sides, in one place the ruptured ice is dislodged and lifted up, in another it sinks; sounds inexpressible by language, and wilder than the howlings of the wilderness, are emitted on every side, and thus the agitation continues for many hours till the whole has found its level, and nature resumes in silence its ordinary course.¹

There had to be then a grand readjustment of supply and demand, a readjustment which would come in its own good time and no quicker. By improvement and expansion agriculture had snared itself in over-production, and though the Corn Laws offered a generous protection the farmers still had to pay the penalty for their "great and imprudent speculations" in the past. So too with industry. Peace was always a mixed blessing inasmuch as a depression was the inevitable accompaniment. Throughout every part of the economy falling prices and tighter credit would necessarily force a return to normal levels of production and consumption, and the greater the effort and therefore derangement of war the greater the pangs of peace-

1 Op.cit., xv (1816). 566. For Huskisson's views see Hansard, 1st ser., xxxvi. 1360-2.

time recovery. Unavoidable as these were, what the government could offer in the way of relief was negligible; resistance to an inexorable economic process was pointless and, similarly, assistance to hasten it could have little significant effect. All that was worth doing was to reassure the country that distress was a temporary aberration and that despite it the national resources remained largely unimpaired. "I see no immediate or adequate Remedy which Govt can apply," wrote Huskisson, an acknowledged expert in such matters. "Their Game must be patience, temper and great discretion in all that is done or said."¹ Needless to say, such an attitude was immediately derived from deep-rooted laissez-faire convictions. Indeed, to ignore this fact is to misunderstand how easily the eighteenth century tradition of limited government could absorb the laissez-faire economic doctrine formally enunciated towards its end. When Squire Western, the champion of the agriculturists in the House of Commons, demanded a bounty on the exportation of corn to draw off what he conceived was a permanent surplus, Robinson of the Board of Trade gave him a straight free-trade answer: "no trade which could stand by itself needed the assistance of a bounty, and ... no bounty could uphold a trade which required artificial support." Likewise Robinson could see no merit in commercial disincentives; as he told parliament on more than one occasion, to adopt "the principle of an universal prohibition" or that of protection to a greater or lesser degree would certainly penalise those industries dependent on imports and probably others if retaliation was the foreign response.² But in view of these firmly liberal opinions

1 Huskisson to Lord Granville, 13 October 1816, PRO 30/29.

2 Harvard, 1st ser., xciii. 695-8, 1082-3, xciv. 1045-51

how well the government would act up to them in the prolonged period of distress which threatened remained to be seen. For in the face of widespread social misery a conflict between economic beliefs and political instincts could easily be envisaged. Should the situation deteriorate until popular discontents jeopardised the government's existence, or worse the state's, the ministers would have to sponsor relief measures though it were against their better judgment; and even supposing things never got this bad they could conceivably be forced to act out of compassion if nothing else. The point was that the administration, any administration has to keep loosely anchored to its principles in order to cope with the ebb and flow of circumstance. Lord Liverpool and his colleagues had a certain duty to maintain law and order, they had sufficient humanitarian impulse to try to prevent a social catastrophe and they owed a loyalty to themselves being in their own eyes the men best fitted to hold the reins of power. If they did venture to interfere - and there were precedents of a sort - it would immediately betoken a critical situation.

The grim progress of distress throughout the winter soon brought about this test of economic principle. Though the ministers kept up a cheerful patter in public, by that time their first confident predictions had long gone by the board. In the half year ending 5 April 1817 the excise was down nearly £1,000,000 on the 1815-16 figure,¹ and this the government, as was its wont, took as evidence of real hardship. Lord Liverpool's forecast too of corn in fair supply² was upset by a massive exportation to France, promoted after August by

¹ PP. 1817, xiv. 14-15.

² Lord Liverpool to Peel, 18 October 1816, Add. MSS. 40181, ff. 77-9.

exemptions and bounties. Strange to relate, in 1816, a year of wild talk about famine, Great Britain's exports of wheat meal and flour exceeded imports and for every seven quarters of wheat brought in two were sent out.¹ The worst of this was that after a poor harvest nothing was better calculated to send prices soaring. At the beginning of August wheat was fetching 77s.4d. a quarter in the maritime counties, but by Christmas it was selling at over 100s. and remained that high well on into the summer.² Naturally the poorer classes were the hardest hit. Just how hard is difficult to say, though the statistics of poor relief are remarkably suggestive. Between 1812-15 about £6,000,000 a year was spent on average; in 1816 this figure jumped to £6,800,000 and a further £1,000,000 the year following, so that at a rough guess half a million more people became dependent on the parish bounty.³ This seemed to afford a glimpse of the Malthusian doom awaiting the country and it was enough to banish mercantilist reservations about emigration for good. "We must always bear in mind," Lord Liverpool wrote when the distress was reaching its height, "that if our Commercial Situation does not improve, Emigration, or Premature Deaths, are the only Remedies. Both must occur to a considerable Extent. It would be most inhuman in such Case, to encourage the latter, by prohibiting the former."⁴ A committee which was at work on the poor laws agreed wholeheartedly, merely adding from an imperial point of view that the colonies were a

1 PP, 1818, xiv. 184-5, 188-9.

2 Ibid., 1821, ix. 381-2.

3 From 1812-15 about 900,000 adults received permanent or occasional assistance each year. Ibid., 1818, xix. 627-30, 1820, xii. 40-3.

4 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 5 April 1817, Sidmouth MSS.

preferable dumping ground to foreign states.¹ But however much emigration was looked upon as a salutary traffic, in the meantime the government was content to stick to tacit encouragement. When every penny of public money had to be counted it was unthinkable to try the novelty of state-assisted colonisation, and as long as distress and commercial stagnation dogged the country the repeal of the prohibitive laws "relative to Artificers going into Foreign Parts" was bound to be regarded as an act of irreparable folly. All that was done in 1817 was to relax many of the restrictions and penalties of the Passenger Act so far as they applied to the insignificant migration to British North America. By allowing ships to carry more passengers and less food the government certainly convinced itself, and no doubt petitions from shipowners and paupers strengthened the conviction, that additional berths and cheaper fares served a social necessity of incontestable importance. Seen in this light, the licensing of human misery was a risk well worth running.²

If it was true that the better-off tended to emigrate, these inducements contributed almost nothing in the way of immediate relief. Certainly the Poor Employment Act, which was hurried through parliament in the early summer of 1817, was a less ambiguous and much more startling example of the government's concern. About the middle of 1816 Vansittart began to toy with the idea of loans to landowners either by Bank mortgages or an issue of Exchequer bills, but on the grounds that

1 PP, 1817, vi.20. See also Sidmouth, iii.155.

2 Oliver Macdonagh, A Pattern of Government Growth, 1800-60, pp.64-5; K.A. Walpole, "The Humanitarian Movement of the Early Nineteenth Century to Remedy Abuses on Emigrant Vessels to America," Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 4th series, xiv (1931). 202-3.

mortgage business was outside its department and that credit was being conserved in view of a return to gold the Bank refused point-blank to co-operate.¹ The objections to direct government assistance proved to be no less insuperable. The principle of advancing public money for private purposes was not without precedent in times of stress, but suitable securities were absolutely essential as was responsible and honest management and on both these counts the government was never completely satisfied.² Since agriculture was showing signs of recovery with higher prices, the plan was no great loss anyway. Vansittart, however, did not give up entirely. Now that landlord relief no longer headed the list of priorities he proceeded to recast his scheme to mitigate the chronic unemployment in the manufacturing districts. In the past ad hoc commissions had often administered loans for public works on parliament's behalf, so in this respect a proposal which offered Exchequer bills to corporations and private individuals for the same purpose was nothing out of the ordinary. But previous loans had been economic rather than social in intent. They had been designed to promote the liquidity of capital in crises and to finance various development projects which frightened away private investment. Vansittart's primary consideration was humanitarian, even moral if it was true that idle hands soon found mischievous occupation. He made it quite clear that the commissioners in charge "would particularly consider the influence the prosecution of any public work would have on

1 Clapham, p.60.

2 According to Lord Liverpool "the best Professional Opinions" were consulted, and also those "well acquainted with the Money Market." The general conclusion was "that such a measure was not practicable upon any sound Principle, & if practicable, would have been productive of more evil than good," Lord Liverpool to Lord Kenyon, 27 May 1817, Add. MSS. 38267, ff.12-13.

the employment of the present unemployed population," and here indeed the short title of the bill spoke for itself. Nonetheless, conscious of the novelty of the plan, the ministers went about its promotion with some diffidence, continuing to insist that "time was the only effectual remedy" for the nation's troubles, that public works were better carried on by "commercial speculation," and that "a combination of circumstances which peculiarly called for the special interposition of parliament" was their only excuse. Yet the consequences of their action could not be denied, and henceforward it was impossible for a government to disavow an obligation to tackle serious unemployment. Neither, it might be added, was calculation unmixed with compassion in this act of social betterment. Hard times were times of political insobriety among the poor, as the events of the winter had made only too plain, and the sooner they were put to work the sooner they would simmer down. Verily, the road towards the welfare state had some peculiar twists in it.

As a corrective to the prevailing unemployment the new act was without doubt of little consequence. Brougham's insinuation that Birmingham's redundant population could use up half the sum allotted to Great Britain in just over a year may or may not have been an exaggeration, but it fairly called to mind the immensity of the problem. And rural parishes, as the government fully intended, had no hope at all of qualifying for loans. Only in the towns, where the labour fluctuation was enormous, was poor law spending likely to be up the necessary fifty or seventy-five per cent, and even there the response was discouraging. All in all, few local authorities were prepared to run into debt when the toss lay between higher rates and jobs for the workless, while as far as private enterprise was concern-

ed the tough securities, the short-term nature of the loans and the preference given to works already in progress killed much of its interest. The disappointing result was that despite the government's earnest professions of concern the worst-hit areas in the North and the Midlands went very short indeed. Perhaps though the measure came a shade too late to be of any real use. Though the ministers hurried the bill through parliament as fast as they possibly could - at one point it required a severe redrafting - it was mid-June before it entered the statute book, and by then, with a good harvest in prospect and trade and industry stepping up, things had definitely taken a turn for the better. Nevertheless, applications did come in thick and fast immediately the commission opened for business. Within two months over one hundred were on file, which at once disproved the opposition's conjecture that capital was freely available for most "promising undertakings." Doubtless the gesture alone was worth it anyway, even if the plan provided no real cure for economic ills or made a meagre contribution to economic development. For months the government had worn an authoritarian stamp, had had to wear it to keep the peace which was its first and foremost responsibility. A measure like this one was a welcome reminder that social quiet was no substitute for social content, and from the ministers' point of view if the coincidence of prosperity made the Poor Employment Bill seem more important than it really was, so much the better.¹

The violence which accompanied the depression took nobody by surprise. The tempo of trouble always quickened when "the inferior set of people" were or imagined themselves

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxvi. 27-48, 569-74, 818-19, 928-32; M.W. Flinn, "The Poor Employment Act of 1817," Economic History Review, 2nd series, xiv (1961-2). 82-92.

to be hardly done by, for rowdiness and riot were a traditional form of protest and social revenge. In October the Prime Minister spoke of "a Stormy Winter" ahead, and in the same breath blamed "the evil of a high Price of Bread coming upon us before we have got rid of our Commercial & Agricultural Distresses."¹ Yet the idea that distress made the pace for disorder is quite untenable. Ireland enjoyed peace and quiet throughout months of famine or near-famine; strangely enough, there the people's wretchedness and their dependence on the charity of government and landlord was in itself a surety of good behaviour.² In Great Britain the most serious violations of law and order occurred in the spring and autumn of 1816 when the line of economic wellbeing was just beginning an abrupt downward trend. The worst outbreak was in East Anglia which for most of May was in a constant state of emergency. What began with isolated cases of midnight arson and angry demonstrations against flour mills and bakers' shops ended with the sack of two market towns in the Isle of Ely, and a special commission ordered twenty-four offenders to the scaffold, though a late reprieve saved all but five for varying terms of transportation and imprisonment. Another frightening disturbance came in October when the iron-workers and colliers of Glamorgan went on the rampage putting out the blast furnaces from Merthyr Tydfil to Llanelli, presumably to square accounts with the proprietors and to pick up recruits. Clearly, the protest was less against present distress than distress to come,

1 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 21 October 1816, Sidmouth MSS. See Sidmouth, iii.148, 150-1 for Sidmouth's and Lord Eldon's apprehensions.

2 Peel, i. 235. See also Sir Henry Torrens to Peel, 2 January 1817, Add. MSS. 40220, f.160: "It is the idleness arising in a plentiful harvest of potatoes, & the cheerfulness with which the Irish Peasant lives upon that fare, rather than work, that create the turbulence of Winter meetings."

for the trouble began with foundrymen in employ who took the law into their own hands after a wage reduction had brought home the unpleasant truth that the war boom was over. The same happened in East Anglia where there was talk of starvation and ruin when the corn was half grown. People cried out, so it seemed, before they were really hurt.¹

Lawlessness like this was exceptional. In the towns and even in the metropolis, the mass meetings and street marches which were the usual form of urban protest passed off without incident though thousands were often involved. The December meeting at Spa Fields may have been the occasion for an attempt at armed insurrection, but a few constables were able to round up the madcaps and the huge concourse came and went in perfect peace. The appetite for violence in fact seemed to have largely disappeared. Why it is hard to say. Perhaps, as the Radicals made out, the hopes and prayers of the lower classes now lay with parliamentary reform or perhaps the army was better equipped to and did take a livelier sense of its responsibilities as "the police force of industrial England."² Certainly the prevalence of outrage was markedly less than it had been five years earlier, even though the movement of the price and wage index suggests that the plunge from prosperity to distress was considerably greater. The opposition, quite rightly, gave the people full marks for good conduct. "No other country in the world," Burdett thought, "could exhibit a population, suffering under such accumulated distresses, where

1 Annual Register, lix (1816), Chronicle, pp.61-2, 66-8, 69-73, 165-7. A.J. Peacock, Bread or Blood is a detailed account of the East Anglian disturbances, sympathetic to the labouring class.

2 Henry Jephson, The Platform, i.381-2; Frank Ongley Darvall, Popular Disturbances and Public Order in Regency England, pp.260-1.

so much forbearance and temper were manifested."¹

To the government, however, this was being too credulous for words. A diabolical plot for revolution lay behind the meetings, and the Home Office had ample evidence to prove it. The first at Spa Fields in the middle of November was in the nature of a dress rehearsal when the desperados behind the conspiracy mustered their mob and tested its fervour, after which plans for a rising a fortnight later went on apace. Ways and means of recruiting soldiers, sailors and goblins were decided, shops and warehouses containing arms and explosives carefully noted, provincial towns warned to hold themselves in readiness, and large supplies of tricolour ribbon ordered in advance. On the appointed day a crowd which came to hear the usual patter about constitutional remedies heard instead the language of sedition and half an hour of this heady stuff rallied a hundred or so for a march on the City, a march which saw shots fired in Cheapside, pillaging in the Minories and one gentleman severely wounded. Nothing more nor less than "a traitorous conspiracy" formed "for the purpose of overthrowing ... the established government, laws, and constitution ... and of effecting a general plunder and division of property" thus came to light. And it was by no means the end of the danger. Frustrated once, with some of their best men under lock and key in the Tower, the "incendaries" went underground to plot and plan afresh. The admonitions against disorder which prefaced every public meeting had been a precaution against premature action. Now they became a blind behind which every conceivable wickedness was carried on - the peddling of penny parodies on

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xxv. 854, 856, 1084, 1098, 1112.

Church and State, the intimidation of magistrates and other law officers, even an assassination attempt on the Prince Regent himself. Indeed, because of this continual incitement insurrection again reared its ugly head in the Manchester meetings at the beginning of March; for though the Blanketeers who set out for London were unarmed and ostensibly seeking redress by petition, in their ranks there lurked scoundrels who hoped to take the capital by sheer weight of numbers. Whatever the opposition said therefore, the right of public meeting was being perverted before their very eyes. One sacred liberty in effect was insidiously becoming the destroyer of the rest, and when this happened securities and safeguards needed no other justification.¹

The period of greatest menace lasted as long as "tumultuous assemblies" were tolerated. Once the Seditious Meetings Act put a stop to the rabble-rousing, "the party of sedition" fell back on hare-brained schemes which government agents had wind of from the very start. A rising at Manchester at the end of March was thwarted by the last-minute arrest of the ringleaders. Another taking in much of the North and Midlands two months later was equally abortive though more of a power and ball affair; while most of the high command was surprised at a rendezvous, two small bands marching on Huddersfield and Nottingham fell in with cavalry patrols and they broke up after shots had been exchanged. Nonetheless, throughout the spring and summer the government could honestly say that it had the situation under control. A handful of fanatics still brooded on revolution but the authorities kept hot on their trail and "the loyalty and good disposition of the great body

1 Reports on the State of the Country, PP, 1817, iv. 1-14; LJ, li. 40-2, 285-7.

of his majesty's subjects, "which parliament freely admitted, almost made them a laughing-stock. The real terror had come earlier when the demagogues had had thousands under their spell. Though they accepted the advance of "popular knowledge," the ruling class found it hard to believe that the common people possessed an innate good sense. Deep down, they felt, there lay a dangerous impulsiveness, a primitive passion which remained uncorrected by full intellectual refinement. "It might reasonably be questioned," a contributor to The Quarterly Review declared, "whether the misinformation of these times be not worse than the ignorance of former ages. For a people who are ignorant and know themselves to be so, will often judge rightly when they are called upon to think at all, acting from common sense, and the unperverted instinct of equity. But there is a kind of half knowledge which seems to disable men even from forming a just opinion of the facts before them - a sort of squint in the understanding which prevents it from seeing straightforward, and by which all objects are distorted."¹ The same warped enthusiasm which filled Methodist chapels to overflowing also made the lower orders the tools and dupes of agitators more cunning than themselves, and the French Revolution provided an awful example of what happened when an unthinking, vicious and easily-led multitude was allowed its head. History seemed so near to repeating itself. In 1789 there had been distress and the political system had been held responsible. Now British people were being told that parliamentary reform would right all wrongs and cure all ills. To the great majority of those with a stake in the country it really did seem as if the meetings at Spa Fields were as much the precursor of revolution as the street corner harangues which had incited

1 Op.cit., xvi (1816-17). 226.

the gangs oulottes into an horrific and never-to-be-forgotten orgy. Even if what had gone before could be overlooked a very great danger was inherent in any situation where the appetite for violence was so obviously being sharpened. Should the demagogues, who were the real villains of the piece, turn "the deluded people" on the soldiery there was no saying where it would end, for the military could never hope to keep a whole population in check. An army 12,000 strong - almost half the size of the home garrison in 1817 - had been required in the North when the Luddite disturbances were at their height, and in 1780 when the Gordon Riots broke out, though thousands of troops had been stationed in and around the capital, it had taken fully a week to drive the mob from the streets. The worst which could happen in view of the government's limited peacemaking resources was simultaneous or nearly simultaneous trouble in several different places, and this the Radical genius was seen as quite capable of organising. For a few months, in fact, the governing class shuddered visibly. If once the rest of the country was given a lead by London and followed it, and evidence of collusion did exist, the prospect was all too horrible to contemplate.

The government, then, was not crying wolf when it asked the House for secret committees on the state of the country. No matter how well-behaved the crowds which came to hear "profane and miserable sophistry" were, no matter how much the poor were bearing their privations "with exemplary patience and resignation," a few desperate men were trying to and, as the ministers firmly believed, conceivably could poison the public mind to bring about the worst of catastrophes. Had the government had better information to act upon it would have been less prone to alarm, but only spies and informers could penetrate the counsels of the disaffected and they told tales

which made everyone's hair stand on end. Doubtless, much of what they passed on to the Home Office was out and out fabrication. Much more must have been tavern talk or second-hand gossip. The trouble was that the typical agent did not know his trade, desperately wanted to prove himself and earned money by results; and the more dastardly the plot the informer divulged the better it was for him. The secret committees of 1817 felt bound to say that due allowance had been made for "questionable" testimony, and this comment spoke for itself.¹ Yet to be on the safe side the government had to credit stories about secret arsenals, lists of proscribed persons and committees of public safety. Too much was at stake not to. The French Revolution had had small beginnings but they had led inexorably to the total subjugation of Christianity, property and law - the three great pillars of civilised existence; and seeing that in Great Britain these were present almost to perfection whereas France, in one sense at least, had been well rid of Romanism, an idle aristocracy and an omnipotent king there was all the more reason for an unrelenting vigilance. "I rely with the utmost confidence," the Prince Regent told parliament, "on your cordial support and co-operation, in upholding a system of Law and Government, from which we have derived inestimable advantages, which has enabled us to conclude, with unexampled glory, a contest whereon depended the best interests of mankind, and which has been hitherto felt by ourselves, as it is acknowledged by other Nations, to be the most perfect that has ever fallen to the lot of any People."² It was a hymn of praise in which few of his listeners would not have been disposed to join.

With so much to lose, and within an ace of losing it

1 PP, 1817, iv. 13; LJ, li.285.

2 Speech on opening the Session, 28 January 1817, CJ, lxxdi.4.

for all the government knew, there was no stopping at half measures, a resolve if anything strengthened after Lord Liverpool had become convinced that the "conspiracy" of 1794 was small beer in comparison.¹ Strangely enough though, it was the end of March, almost four months after the incident at Spa Fields, before the government had the emergency powers it felt it needed, and stranger still the delay was a quite deliberate decision on the part of the Cabinet. Over this, not surprisingly, Sidmouth by no means saw eye to eye with the Prime Minister. As the minister responsible for keeping order, not only did he want the imperfections of the legal equipment put right as soon as possible, but he also saw parliament as a platform from which the government and others so inclined could rally the loyal and harass the seditious.² But Liverpool wanted to act the libertarian as long as he could. "I have never known," he confided to Peel, "any Period of Internal Distress arising from defective Crops or Stagnation in Trade, in which the Discussions of Parliament did not do more harm than the Measures of Relief proposed afforded Benefit."³ The moment the liberty of the individual was tampered with, he saw, the opposition was sure to make a fuss, which would hardly calm the country; and the more evidence the government had, the more desperate the situation seemed, the better its chances of coming away morally and legally supported. Meanwhile, at a time like

1 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 21 October 1816, Sidmouth MSS; Peel, i.237; Hansard, 1st ser., xiv.573.

2 Lord Sidmouth to Lord Liverpool, 5 November 1816, Sidmouth MSS; Sidmouth, iii. 161. The Home Secretary seems to have had second thoughts on the subject. On 16 September he had written to Admiral Frank "that, on public grounds, an early meeting of parliament ought rather to be avoided than desired." Ibid., p.149.

3 Lord Liverpool to Peel, 18 October 1816, Add. MSS. 40181, ff. 78-9.

this when the magistracy had its hands full, there was plenty peers and members of parliament could do in their counties.¹ Thus to his mind a policy of wait and see had several undoubted advantages, and those of his colleagues who could be collected together in the holidays must have been equally convinced since on 4 November parliament's meeting was put off until the beginning of January. Of course, the difference with Sidmouth was nothing serious, essentially a clash between administrative and political points of view. The Home Secretary first and foremost wanted tools for the job. His colleagues wanted to make certain he was not refused them by holding back until the existing laws had been tried and found wanting.

Probably work was begun on the new bills sometime during January. From all accounts a decision to seek extraordinary powers was pending after the Spa Fields trouble, and the go-ahead was given once spine-chilling evidence, good enough to satisfy parliament's scruples, had come to hand early in the New Year.² The ministers themselves were quite emphatic that the attack on the Prince Regent on the opening day of the session had nothing to do with it, and since they had discussed the state of the country twice in the preceding fortnight there can be little doubt they were speaking the truth.³ It was on 21 February that the government began bringing its measures forward and in these could be read in full the fears which had been their inspiration. One bill, to be sure, merely corrected an oversight which had deprived the Prince Regent of the protection of the Treasonable and Seditious Practices Act, but the others hammered home the idea that a distressed population had

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxv. 571.

2 Ibid., 570-1.

3 Ibid., 193, 209; Darvall, p.226.

regrettably fallen prey to the wicked machinations of "an active and enterprising minority." To destroy this revolutionary underground the licensing of "every House, Room, Field, or other Place" used for public lecture or debate was ordered, any form of federation absolutely prohibited, the Spencean societies - supposedly hotbeds of sedition - banned by law and habeas corpus partially suspended.¹ The right of assembly was also restricted to put the common people out of harm's way. Henceforth, with certain exceptions, a meeting of fifty or more required what amounted to official permission and the magistrates had power to intervene the moment they imagined insult had been done to the king, the government or the constitution. Finally, since plans to win over soldiers and sailors had come to light the incitement of mutiny was made a capital offence.

Though the secret committees remarked on "seditious and inflammatory" publications "marked by a peculiar Character of Irreligion and Blasphemy," the press was hardly touched.² A proposal to license reading rooms as well as political clubs got no further than the committee stage of the Meetings Bill,³ and in only one instance it seems did a magistrate obey Sidmouth's famous circular of 27 March which passed on the law officers' opinion that a person accused of publishing a libel could be arrested and held pending bail.⁴ Some people perhaps wondered why the government did not make do with the powers it had. By law a printer had to register his presses, keep a

1 Partially, in the sense that it applied only to persons arrested for treason or suspicion of treason.

2 LJ, 11.42, 286; PP, 1817, iv.6, 13.

3 Compare the Bill as introduced and reported, *ibid.*, i.71, 87.

4 Aspinall, Politics and the Press, 1780-1850, pp.49-54. For a copy of the circular and the law officers' statement see PP, 1817, xv.7-8.

record of who commissioned work and display his name and address on every copy he produced. A bookseller who kept stock which flouted this last regulation was liable to prosecution. So was the licensee of a public house if he allowed "Publications of a seditious or immoral Nature" to be read on his premises. Moreover, the Attorney-General could threaten any journalist with a law suit by filing information ex officio against him, and should a trial for libel come on, which might or might not follow this sort of indictment, the defence had to contend with a special jury of the Crown's nomination. Yet in practice these powers did not amount to very much. As the general factotum of the central government the local justice was busy in a thousand and one ways and for most of the time the illegal press flourished unscathed, only feeling the lash of the law when its audacity and virulence asked for it, when "twopenny trash" really did seem to be threatening the country's ruin. But there was deliberate shirking as well. Apart from being overworked the magistrates also had qualms about exercising the jurisdiction they possessed. Indeed, frequently it was found an eye judiciously blind saved embarrassment all round. For instance, he who arrested a news vendor or closed a public house or reading room took upon himself to declare what literature was seditious, profane or immoral, and unless a previous judgment had been handed down regarding a particular work this by itself was ample reason for leaving well alone. Furthermore, those required to enforce the law could not help being aware that in too many cases no allowance could be made for extenuating circumstances. Most of the penalties imposed for this type of offence were obligatory and as a result the rogue suffered no more than the honest man whose criminality only extended to an inadvertent mistake. The sole discretion vested in the magistrate was to pursue the prosecution in one case and waive

it in the other, though this presumed that one could distinguish between criminal intent and innocent error which was sometimes far from easy. But above all, few were ready to enforce a law which was matter of doubt in important respects. Precisely for this reason Sidmouth's letter to the lords lieutenant evoked a negligible response in the country. On the narrow ground of the decision of the Court of Common Pleas in Wilkes's case (1763) where the defendant charged with publishing a libel was able to plead his membership of parliament it presumed to declare that persons not so privileged could be apprehended and a surety demanded. However, before taking on a discretionary power of arrest in such cases, which would in effect amount to a power to silence for long periods whoever caught their attention, the magistrates understandably wanted to hear what weightier authorities than the advocates of the Crown had to say. Similarly with the Hawkers and Pedlars Act mentioned in the same circular. Dating back to the reign of William III this prohibited hawking and peddling without a licence, but whether street vendors of books and pamphlets came within its purview was arguable inasmuch as one clause specifically exempted those who sold "acts of parliament, forms of prayer, proclamations, gazettes, licenced almanacks or other printed papers licenced by authority."¹ So dubious were its provisions, in fact, that though the Home Office in this instance vigorously defended its applicability, not one successful prosecution, if the Whig opposition is to be believed, was carried in consequence.² Altogether, when obnoxious opinions were to be suppressed, the law was a most difficult weapon to wield,

1 9 William III c.27. Statutes at Large, x.168-73.

2 Hansard, 1st ser., xcvi. 1186.

a two-edged sword which of necessity required careful handling. The main difficulty was simply its obscurity in certain particulars. There was a patent need for its better definition; and while this could only be a matter of time until it was done a magistracy not even semi-professional perforce proceeded with caution.

In view of these reservations at the local level it was usually the government which sought to bring "blasphemers" and "sedition-mongers" to book. On occasions prosecutions were the result of some direct provocation, more often they stemmed from a natural desire to make some exhibition of authority. But what is most interesting is that they showed the government to be almost as inhibited and powerless as the justices in the counties. The Attorney-General, for example, used his prerogative to file information ex officio very sparingly indeed because a free press was every Briton's boast and parliament had a habit of occasionally checking the facts.¹ Neither did he prosecute each and every libel which came to his notice, for a court demanded that he prove not only publication, often difficult thanks to the dodges employed, but the malice of the act as well. Cobbett, arch-villain in the government's eyes, put out his twopenny Political Register for four months without once being called to account, while Hone the parodist and Wheeler of the Black Dwarf escaped five libel charges between them, one on the technicality that articles set up in type without a manuscript could not be described as written. All in all, the government was in an astonishingly feeble position. It could not stop the publication of Radical "trash" because a preventative censorship was unknown in law, the offence lying in

1 Brougham brought in a bill to curb the Attorney-General's powers in 1816. Five years earlier the opposition had called for an account of their exercise.

the act rather than the intent. Nor could it do much to check its availability. To tax penny parodies and suchlike out of existence was a waste of time because it destroyed the antidote along with the poison, and prosecutions, however successful - a two year gaol sentence was usual - had the effect of advertising rather than silencing disreputable authors. In short, the press laws as they stood were totally inadequate for the purpose of keeping public opinion duly subordinate. The fact that Cobbett could sell over 40,000 copies of his Political Register each week while his opponents relied on subsidies, Post Office facilities and free propaganda was ample testimony that the government could never force the public to read what it alone considered good and wholesome. Permanently forbidden the powers which a totalitarian state commands by the country's obsession for traditional liberties, the administrations of the early nineteenth century had to learn to endure a growing tide of public criticism as best they could, and once they had come to a proper appreciation of their helplessness "gagging acts" and all other means to browbeat alien opinion became steadily obsolescent.

Not for one moment did the government expect parliament to question its assessment of the country's situation. After the opening encounter on the Address Peel described the attitude of the Commons as "good, excellent with respect to reform and seditious societies," and looking back a few weeks later when all was nearly done, Lord Melville admitted that he and his colleagues had "had little doubt of being enabled to carry such measures as we might deem expedient."¹ The point

1 Peel, i. 238; Lord Melville to Charles Hope, 2 March 1817, NLS MSS 10, f.1.

was that parliament had no information to go on other than what the government gave it. Even those who attended from the disturbed districts made vague assertions and little else. Only one member, a Lancashire manufacturer, spoke of what he had seen with his own eyes and, significantly, he went on to suggest that everyone was being too credulous for words.¹ All too probably, believing in the alarm parliament unwittingly exaggerated it, for the government would never have let the evidence which went before the secret committees play down "the nefariousness of certain designing persons" - rather the opposite. Against this engrossment in gunpowder, treason and plot, the Whigs laboured in vain. Had they had information of the sort the Leeds Mercury later provided, after it had done detective work on Oliver the spy's activities, they might have disputed the government's findings with telling effect and put things in better proportion. Without the facts, they fell back on wholesale accusations and tried to make a splash as the lone defenders of civil liberties. The government, they said, was secretly nursing authoritarian ambitions and using the present scare to distract attention from the economical reform which had hitherto frustrated these heinously wicked designs. Why else would fundamental freedoms be withheld when no war was being fought and the people were peaceably disposed? This was nonsense at any time but now it went down even worse when it was seen that half the party held no such talk. While election by ballot gave the ministers a majority on the secret committees as a matter of course, the few Whigs who were voted did not prevent unanimous reports being returned. The Duke of Bedford stayed away in disgust, but the rest publicly avowed that the ministers

1 George Philips, M.P. for Ilchester. Hansard, 1st ser., xxiv. 702-5.

were right.¹ "evil-minded and insidious men" were subverting everything Britons held dear. After this, inevitably the opposition faltered. On the Habeas Corpus Suspension Bill they amassed about one hundred votes or two-thirds of their regular strength in the House of Commons, on the others never more than thirty or forty. All were through parliament within three weeks except the legally complex Seditious Meetings Bill, and that passed a fortnight later. Much the same happened when the further suspension of habeas corpus came up at the end of the session; Grenville and Elliot accepted the reports in their entirety, Lamb remained uncommitted, while the others only jibbed at "extraordinary powers," Piggott and Ponsonby refusing to attend when they read the government's play. Again legislation was hurried through both Houses, this time in two weeks flat. If one member of the Commons' committee is to be believed, "at the conclusion of their work there was not a single difference unadjusted, except the practical recommendation that grew out of the facts and observations in which all concurred."² The statement summed up the extreme weakness of the Whig position. Even those who agreed there was cause for alarm balked at severe counter-measures, and this way the party as a whole failed to come to terms with the feeling which parliament and the country had in general, that in the circumstances it was better to do too much and be sure than too little and be sorry.

The problems of distress and order by no means dee-

1 The opening remarks of the Commons' report attested unanimity. PP, 1817, iv.3. Lord Milton, Piggott, Ponsonby, Elliot and Lamb sat on the Commons' committee, and, apart from the Duke of Bedford, Fitzwilliam and Grenville on the Lords'. For their statements in the House see Hanbard, 1st ser., xxxv. 491, 586, 605, 614, 616, 730, 805.

2 Lord Lascelles. Ibid., xxxvi. 1086.

troyed let alone weakened parliament's obsession for "rigid, unsparing economy." Throughout the session the opposition persisted with the thesis that each and every affliction proceeded from the original sin of governmental extravagance, that distress was the child of bad government and trouble its grand-child. In the words of Burdett's celebrated quip, "the Ex-penceans" in their ignorance were perpetually aiding and abetting the villainous, treasonous, godless Spenceans. "Prompt and effectual reductions" in all departments, Lord Grey's amendment to the Address declared, were "the first step to relieve the distresses, and redress the grievances of which the people so justly complain."¹ From the government's point of view such accusations could never be taken lightly. Stories of ministerial perfidy always appealed to the country's deep-rooted suspicions of executive power and because they were generally believed the Whigs by relaying them afresh only gave them greater credence. As Huskisson said, however much the administration might talk of "inevitable difficulties," the people, especially the middle classes, were all too ready to lay the blame on "systematic misrule."² In this instance too the greater the trumpetings about sedition the greater the suspicion of "sensible and moderate men." Not inconceivably they would conclude that the government wished "to magnify a mob into a rebellion, in order that a tub may be thrown to the whale, the public attention diverted from economy, and a pretext made for maintaining the military."³ In these circumstances what had to be done was never in doubt. With an

1 Ibid., xxv. 57-8.

2 Huskisson to Lord Granville, 13 October 1816, PRO 30/29.

3 Peel, i. 236.

election in the offing the country gentlemen were already being assailed in their counties by parliamentary reformers and the general outcry against exorbitant public spending, and a plan of thoroughgoing economy would not only arm them with a suitable reply but also nerve them to act tough with "treason under the mask of reform" in the meantime. Better still, the Whig argument would be shot to pieces; for if the country gentlemen stood forth as advocates of both economy and repression they would openly repudiate the connection between expensive government and civil commotion. Or to use Lord Castlereagh's words: "the elements of mischief and of embarrassment ... much blended at the outset" would be decomposed for good.¹

As it was, difficulties over the budget would have forced a cut in government spending regardless of any considerations properly speaking political. Once again the problem was to balance an abnormal expenditure with a revenue unsupplemented by new levies or large loans, a revenue moreover which was falling off alarmingly as the economy slowed down. At the outset the ministers made a firm resolution to keep the charge of government, which excluded the charge of debt, below £18,000,000 if they possibly could,² but even with this considerable reduction when ways and means came to be discussed no one counted on

1 Wellington Sup. Desp., xi.660.

2 Compare the memoranda in Castlereagh MSS, xxxi. 33-4, 37-8 where the charge is first given as £19,321,000 and then as £17,880,000. "In order to be quite sure of getting Our Expenditure below £18,000,000," the latter paper continues, "and to allow for such unforeseen Expenses as never fail to occur, it seems absolutely necessary that the Army Ordinaries should not exceed £6,600,000, the Navy £6,000,000 and the Ordnance £1,100,000. By such further Reductions our Supply would stand better by £250,000"

taxation contributing anything. Indeed, the revenue returns for the year ending 5 January 1817 were described as "a severe blow."¹ Making allowance for taxes discontinued in 1816, the net produce appeared to be down £4,000,000 - the excise ten and the customs nearly twenty per cent - and not surprisingly the deficiency on the consolidated fund amounted to £600,000.² Since 1815 had been a year of "extraordinary Produce" these figures were not as bad as they looked,³ but it still had to be borne in mind that economic recovery would be slow which made a drastic improvement wholly out of the question. Without a surplus accruing on the consolidated fund not one penny of current taxation would be available for the supplies, and this meant raising the entire £18,000,000 somehow else. Here most options were ruled out immediately. The sinking fund could not be tampered with because in the aftermath of war and during economic doldrums the public credit was seen as requiring unmitigated support. Nor for the same reason would the ministers borrow and increase the funded debt. All they could really do to make ends meet was scrape up a little money from tax arrears and leftovers from previous grants, and cover the rest by an issue of exchequer and treasury bills while interest rates were dropping and the demand was good. As the debt to be incurred would roughly equal the debt which the sinking fund would redeem, the year, as Castlereagh put it, would "be at best Stationary."⁴ But this was better than nothing. Had a larger loan been required, the traditional policy of debt liquidation would have been flouted and the public credit apparently

1 Lord Melville to Charles Hope, 2 March 1817, FLS MSS 10, f.2.

2 PP, 1817, iv. 182-4, xii. 52-77.

3 Lushington, one of the Treasury Secretaries, argued this point at length in a memorandum dated 20 February 1817. Castlereagh MSS, xxii. 414-54.

4 Lord Castlereagh to Charles Abbot, 13 January [1817], PRO 30/9.

sacrificed for a momentary advantage. Herein lay the incentive to leave no stone unturned in the search for reductions. "It was quite clear," Lord Melville wrote not long afterwards, "that unless we could satisfy the country, & particularly the monied people in the City, that at least we were not getting deeper in debt, & that we could so far cut down our expenses as to make the two ends of the year meet ... the most serious consequences were to be apprehended, & at any rate no administration could stand against the despondency & discontent which a different state of things would produce."¹

The largest single item in the supplies was of course the army. The previous year parliament had voted over £10,800,000 to support an establishment of 149,000 and the government certainly could not afford the like again. Still, throughout 1816 reductions had gone on apace. The returns from the Adjutant-General's office on 25 December listed the number of effectives as 146,994 almost 30,000 less than twelve months earlier,² and in one remarkable instance the ministers even forced an unscheduled economy, the reduction of the cavalry establishment at home and in Ireland. To be sure, the Commander-in-Chief, who held this branch of the service in high regard, did not take the proposal lying down. He had already had occasion to mention its usefulness as a force to harry smugglers and put down disturbances,³ and on learning what was afoot he immediately wrote "a very strong remonstrance" for Lord Bathurst to lay before the Cabinet. When that was rejected, mainly on the grounds that the yeomanry could handle day to day duties and the

1 Lord Melville to Charles Hope, 2 March 1817, FLS MSS.10, ff.1-2. See also Peel to Lord Whitworth, 29 January 1817, Add. MSS.40292, ff.115-16.

2 PP, 1816, xii. 421, 1817, xiii. 193.

3 See his "Memorandum Relating to the Cavalry," 29 December 1815, Add. MSS. 48427, ff. 133-5.

cavalry in France any real emergency, he made haste to Carlton House and his royal brother, who promptly asked his ministers to reconsider their decision.¹ Even so, they refused to give way,² and as this happened in August memory of the tiff must have still been fresh when the estimates came up for discussion just before Christmas. Certainly all concerned did their utmost to avoid a repetition. A meeting at Fife House on 18 December fixed the establishment at 130,450, though this figure was later whittled down when Dublin agreed to a reduction after March and the Allied powers to a partial withdrawal from France.³ To have gone further, the government felt, would have been sheer madness. Castlereagh had to admit in the House that it had been found "necessary in a great measure to put out of view the military defence of the colonies against any external attack," and in private the Prime Minister called it "an Army not more than sufficient certainly for the Protection of the British Dominions."⁴ The annoying thought was that in view of trouble

- 1 Lord Bathurst to the Duke of York, 20 August 1816, Bathurst MSS; Bathurst, pp.423, 425-6; Wellington Sup. Desps., xi. 469-70. According to The Times, 4 September 1816, the Duke of York saw the Prince Regent on 3 September. Certainly Lord Bathurst had written on 29 August that "the measure is considered as decided."
- 2 The second report of the select committee on finance mentions the reductions as having been carried through. PP, 1817, iv.44.
- 3 Memorandum, 18 December 1816, Add. MSS. 48430, ff.73-4. The establishments in 1816 and 1817 compared thus:

	1816	1817
Great Britain	28,000	26,000
Ireland	25,000	22,000
France	30,000	25,000
India	20,000	17,000
Other overseas stations	<u>46,000</u>	<u>33,000</u>
	149,000	123,000

- 4 Hansard, 1st ser., xxv. 257; Lord Liverpool to Peel, 20 December 1816, Add. MSS. 40181, f.87.

at home and defencelessness abroad the Prince Regent might again prove awkward, especially if the Commander-in-Chief had words in his ear in the meanwhile. Fortunately, this time everything went smoothly. The Duke of York promised not to make a nuisance of himself, even agreeing to keep his brother in the dark until the day before Liverpool and Castlereagh presented themselves at Brighton, and by that time the Duke of Wellington, on furlough from France, had himself won the Prince Regent round, telling him, so he said, "that after the Reduction he would still have the means of bringing into the field a better & more efficient Army than I had ever seen in the British Service."¹ With numbers settled, serious work was able to begin on the estimates. The ministers would have liked to have got these much lower than they eventually managed. Where one paper hopefully suggested £6,700,000 for the ordinaries and a total charge of £8,730,000 - exactly £500,000 less than the amount tentatively held out to the Commons - the estimates in their final form required a vote of about £9,000,000, equal to half the supply. Still, there was some consolation in that even that represented a saving of nearly £1,750,000, and parliament obviously thought this effort good enough by passing them with little further ado.²

For once, the navy got rougher treatment than the army. It too had busily reduced itself, being in February 1817 half the size it had been ten months earlier,³ but this time the ministers took full account of the fact that a fleet could be

- 1 Lord Bathurst to Lord Castlereagh, 25 December 1816, Duke of Wellington to same, 29 December 1816, Castlereagh MSS, xxi. 1066-7, 1078-9.
- 2 Undated memorandum, *ibid.*, xxxii. 37-8; Hansard, 1st ser., xxxv. 258-9, xxxvi. 1101.
- 3 On 25 March 1816 the number of ships in commission was given as 239 and on 1 February 1817 as 185. However, at least 55 of the latter were vessels in the revenue service newly come under Admiralty orders. CJ, lxxi. 672; PP, 1817, iv. 269, xiii. 339.

made ready for service far quicker than an army. The establishment of seamen and marines barely exceeded the number voted in 1792, and this was irrespective of a growing mercantile marine, a larger empire and the rise to prominence of the seventy-four with its proportionately heavier complement than the older sixty-four or fifty. Furthermore, exclusive of money put aside to pay off debts, the estimates for the year were £4,000,000 down on those of 1816. The biggest reductions took place in the seagoing part of the service, for in the administrative and technical branches peace created an enormous backlog of paper and dockyard work as crews were paid off, ships laid up and claims for half pay and pensions sorted out. The wear and tear estimate, for instance, which calculated per man covered the expense of the force afloat, was £1,350,000 less; that for the transport service, a composite charge for troop and supply ships, seamen casualties and prisoners of war, about £1,600,000. Since it was pointless to cut down the civil establishment while the business remained in arrears, the real economies were made in the dockyards. The huge bill run up by ships in ordinary was slightly reduced by keeping smaller crews aboard, considerably so by selling or breaking a vast number of vessels beyond reasonable repair; and despite the fast deteriorating condition of the fleet, the sum available for building and repair was cut by a quarter and that for dockyard and harbour improvement by fully one half.¹ With only 150 battleships and frigates fit

1 See the report of the Finance Committee on the navy estimates, PP, 1817, iv. 203-25 and undated memorandum, Castlereagh MSS., xxvii. 274-85. In round figures the estimates for 1816 and 1817 compared thus:

	1816	1817
	£	£
Ships in commission	2,911,000	1,556,000
Ships in ordinary	922,000	687,000
Civil establishment	1,842,000	1,788,000

for immediate service¹ against a supposed strength of 240, such skimping and scraping seemed madness to naval men and well before the year was up they were calling out loud for increases.² Never again, indeed, was the financial straitjacket drawn this tight. Yet the daring and preposterousness of the reductions clearly showed what frame of mind the government was in. The second year of peace the cheeseparing was done in real earnest.

Hard as the ministers laboured, their work received a scant acknowledgement. The chief complaint of the public, and with an election close at hand parliament quickly chorused it, lay not with large establishments but politicians' profits. Almost every reform petition sent in from the country made a set at "useless sinecures and unmerited pensions, the excessive salaries paid to the higher Officers in the State, and the unexampled magnitude of the Civil List," such allegations being part and parcel of the habitual assumption that misgovernment lay at the heart of the nation's troubles and nothing else. Of course, when pensions, places and civil list expenditure had been under regulation for years and politicians went out of office little richer than they went in³ this was totally absurd, but whether the ministers liked it or not the assertion that the

Shipbuilding and repair	1,565,000	1,139,000
Dockyard and harbour improvements	577,000	252,000
Transport service	1,858,000	261,000
	<u>9,678,000</u>	<u>5,685,000</u>

1 Navy Board to the Secretary of the Admiralty, 16 January 1817, NLS MSS 1044, ff. 192-201.

2 Bathurst, pp.436-9.

3 Canning made some interesting remarks in this respect. In 1821 when he was deciding whether to seek office at home or the Indian viceroyalty he noted that the salary of £6,000 allowed the Home Secretary hardly met his expenses and that much the same applied to the First Lord of the Admiralty and the President of the Board of Control. The next year too on Castlereagh's death he was torn between the glory but penury

Crown's influence was increasing had to meet with some notice, not least because the parliament was old and popular pressures greater in consequence. An inquiry into sinecure offices had been hanging fire for years anyway. Twice when the government was in its infancy the Lords had provocatively thrown out bills which would have made a clean sweep of them, and certain that sooner or later the Commons would try again the ministers since then had anxiously waited every vacancy. The sudden death of the Earl of Buckinghamshire in February 1816, which rendered an exceptionally lucrative sinecure in the Irish Court of Exchequer disposable, finally brought matters to a head. Should the House of Commons act up to an earlier resolution to regulate the office, the government saw an "inconvenient precedent" in the making, for if one sinecure could be swept away regardless of the need to reward long and loyal political service, so could the rest. Fortunately, a lawsuit between the Crown and the Chief Baron over the right of appointment provided an excuse to impound the fees and emoluments, and thus gratified parliament swallowed its impatience. Until the amount of these was precisely ascertained nothing could be done in any case. But the whole question of sinecures was only shelved for the time being.¹ As Castlereagh reported, the week before Christmas

of high office and the lavish emoluments of Bengal. Neither the Exchequer nor the Foreign Office, he declared, offered enough "to provide for the proper performance of the duties of Leader of the H of C." Canning to Mrs Canning, 16 April 1821, 3, 8 September 1822, Canning MSS.

- 1 The office was the Clerk of the Pleas, worth about £8,250 a year to the principal and £10,000 to his two deputies. PP, 1817, xi.6. For details of the question see Peel to Lord Whitworth, 8, 11, 15 February 1816, to Lord Sidmouth, 16 February 1816, Add. MSS. 40290, ff. 56, 63-4, 78-80, 83; Peel, i. 212; Hansard, 1st ser., xxii. 331-2, 337-8, 546-7, xxxiii. 939-40, xxxiv. 5-9, 91-6.

he and his colleagues were all back in Town going over it afresh.¹

Always the ministers were haunted by fears that given half a chance the House of Commons would go reform-mad, that having begun the work it would not call a halt until the influence of the Crown had been reduced to negligible proportions and rendered utterly useless for the purposes of efficient government. Somewhere the line had to be drawn between saving money and destroying the system. The right formula or principle was a complicated one, mainly because a distinction had to be made between offices of wartime creation now become moribund and old sinecures representing a traditional influence. The former, recent appendages, were indefensible where the latter were indispensable, and an indiscriminate attack on inefficient offices would have ignored this important difference with perhaps catastrophic results. As the Prime Minister told Lord Palmerston: "Some of the Lords of the Treasury & of the Admiralty might on this Principle be reduced - Many Political Situations might be expected to be consolidated & in short there is no saying where such a System of Reform & Innovation might stop or what wd. be the result of it when carried into execution." This did not mean that the ministers were ready to defend sinecures to the last against an increasingly hostile public opinion; in other words, that they would "rest upon the Principle of a Recurrence to a State of Things wch. had been known & tried & which had not been considered either as profusely extravagant or as dangerous to the Constitution of the Country."² It did mean that they were to be left alone until

1 Castlereagh, xi. 330.

2 Lord Liverpool to Lord Palmerston, 30 December 1816, Add. MSS. 38264, ff. 72-6.

an equivalent system of political reward had been devised. Seeing that the House of Commons had already insisted upon the same, such a condition seemed fair, reasonable and safe.¹

The weeding out of redundant war offices went off without a hitch. In April 1816 the Treasury entrusted the work to a small commission of official men headed by Lord Binning, and as proof of a job well in hand a memorandum summarising its reports on eighteen different offices and departments was laid before parliament early next session.² On the other question though, that of the sinecures, the ferocity of the Commons caught the government quite by surprise. The ministers, as far as economy went, came to the House full of fair words and fine promises. They proposed a select committee to scrutinise their estimates, offered a voluntary tax on official salaries, and in the Prince Regent's name struck £50,000 off the civil list, the privy purse and the Duchy of Cornwall revenues. This was straight-forward window-dressing, much of it not altogether sensible, for the House could ponder estimates to its heart's content as it was and any voluntary austerity in high places could suggest that more than enough was there before.³ Still, for the moment parliament's interest lay elsewhere. Apprised of the government's plans, the opposition immediately demanded a separate inquiry into public salaries and emoluments, and though the country gentlemen were unenthusiastic their spokesmen, Wilberforce and Acland, made a damaging affirmation of the Crown's increasing influence and the unsuitability of all-powerful ministerial representation on a committee intended to check it. Divisions much too close

1 See the resolutions of 31 May 1810, CJ, lxxv. 436-40.

2 PP, 1817, xv. 11-21.

3 See Peel's criticisms. Peel to Lord Whitworth, 12 February 1817, Add. MSS. 40292, ff. 141-2.

for comfort followed the nomination of Huskisson and Lord Binning - two official men - for places.¹ "The Ministers disconcerted by this apparent temper of the Ho[use]," wrote the Speaker in his diary that night.² Reluctantly, very reluctantly, on the subject of sinecures the government saw no option but to fall in with parliament's and the country's wishes. The truth was that the ministers had been ready to jump that fence when they came to it and not before, and now the moment had obviously arrived. Probably all along, since the political importance of sinecures was taken for granted, a faint hope had remained that parliament would come to its senses and leave them be. The first task of the committee was to have been an open acknowledgement of official parsimony through the trenchant examination of estimates and public accounts; its second a consideration of "further measures" of relief, which might or might not have included the abolition of sinecures.³ Now, however, with placemen again parliament's pet aversion, the priorities had to be reversed. Sir Matthew Ridley, a Whig stalwart, already had a motion on the Admiralty lords down in the order book, and if this was a taste of things to come, the whole of the Crown's "just influence" was immediately jeopardised. How could sinecures survive if the House in its wrath refused to spare the so-called "parliamentary" or "political" offices? Lord Melville fairly stated the seriousness of the situation:

All our confidential friends in the H. of Commons, without exception, on whom we could most depend, were decidedly of

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxv. 252-308.

2 7 February 1817, PRO 30/9, 36. The entry is misprinted in Colchester, ii. 601.

3 See the committee's terms of reference, CJ, lxxdi. 37.

4 He gave notice the same day the government announced its economies. The Times, 8 February 1817.

opinion that unless we could come to some understanding & compromise by which we could give the Country Gentlemen a plausible reason for being fully satisfied, we ran great risk of being beat in detail, office after office, & though we might not feel ourselves called upon to resign after losing one or two of those questions, it would be impossible for us to go on with credit to ourselves or with advantage to the Public if the House were to get into the habit of beating us, even with many of the persons engaged in that course thinking perhaps very innocently that there was no harm in it, & not wishing to drive us out.¹

The ministers, then, acted to save not only the government but the system of government. A decision to surrender sinecures was taken, albeit reluctantly, because it alone was the sop that would do, gratifying the people and therefore those about to face them on the hustings. Not that the Crown suffered any loss of "constitutional power and patronage" as a result, for a pension scheme reserved for politicians of the highest rank was to come gradually into operation over a twelve-year period as existing interests expired one after another.² Needless to say, the government made its proposals public at the earliest possible moment. Ridley's motion stood for 18 February. On Monday, 17 February, after a weekend of Cabinet meetings, "about forty of the most discontented" country gentlemen were invited to Fife House and told the good news.³ The next day, presumably, the Finance Committee sat down to a different agenda.

- 1 Lord Melville to Charles Hope, 2 March 1817, NLS MSS. 10, f.4. See also Wellington Sup.Desp., xi. 660-1.
- 2 The Crown to some extent lost its discretionary power of reward, for only those who had served in certain offices for a certain number of years were eligible. Still, the few sinecures that were left had been reserved for deserving cases anyway.
- 3 The Cabinet met on Saturday and Sunday afternoon, on each occasion for over two hours. The Times, 17 February 1817. For mention of the Fife House meeting see Lord Melville to Charles Hope, 2 March 1817, NLS MSS. 10 f.5; Colchester, ii. 604.

A saving of a few thousand had suddenly acquired more importance than a saving of millions.

The rest of the session was plain sailing. "The language of the Country Gentlemen is," Peel reported right at the beginning, "that if the Government can show that they have done the work of Retrenchment honestly - that they will be as firmly supported as any Govt. ever was,"¹ That they meant it became only too apparent. The government had obliged them and now they obliged the government, so much so that long before the Easter holidays some of the opposition were skulking off into the country. In the Finance Committee a few days after the Pife House meeting a "sweeping resolution" on sinecures failed nineteen to two. Thereafter it was as "reasonable & manageable" as the ministers could wish.² The army and navy estimates, duly blessed, passed through the House without once encountering serious opposition. So did the Civil Services Compensation Bill, though pensions in lieu of sinecures were a trivial saving and instead of having fewer offices in its gift the Crown ended up with more.³ Nonetheless, the ministers regarded Ridley's motion as the real test of the country gentlemen's goodwill, for an Admiralty lordship was an "efficient" if "secondary" office and there was at stake the principle of the

1 Peel to Lord Whitworth, 30 January 1817, Add. MSS. 40292, f.118.

2 Lord Melville to Charles Hepe, 2 March 1817, WLS MSS. 10, f.6.

3 The charge of the sinecures was roughly £100,000 and the pension list at its maximum £ 42,000. However, many of the offices were reduced, not abolished, and the estimated charge of these reformed establishments was little short of £50,000. Since the subordinate positions were transferred from the principals' to the Crown's patronage, the influence of the latter was actually increased. "You will perceive the change is more nominal than substantive," Castlereagh told Wellington. Wellington Sup. Desp., xi. 667-8.

smooth and proper working of the constitution through the modicum of influence which it and others like it supplied. It being idle to pretend that the office had an administrative raison d'être, on this ground alone they made their defence. The Whigs, Canning told the House, "would pull down the building to obtain possession of the ruins."¹ Yet the majority which followed was more than a vindication of the political cleverness of the ministers. It was the country gentlemen's vote of confidence in a government which refused to admit that the system was amiss. Both reiterated their belief that the Crown required "a salutary influence" to govern, refusing to find here a cause for existing economic troubles. In doing so both acknowledged the perfection of the constitution as it stood. Castlereagh's boast was quite permissible: "We separated the question of economy from that of seditious reform, and we became masters of both."²

1 For the debate see Hansard, 1st ser., lxxv. 654-94.

2 Wellington Sup. Desp., xl. 661.

A GOVERNMENT IN RETREAT

To the ministers the economy, like the Deity, moved in mysterious ways; and even when they admitted as much few of their contemporaries appeared to hold it against them. True, some men convinced themselves that taxation was the sole cause of present discontents, but this view lost tenability when conditions worsened in spite of substantial relief. Most were as fatalist as parliament, wanting no more than vague assurances of inevitable recovery and believing in all sincerity that sooner or later the fundamental laws governing the employment of capital would work to the country's advantage as surely as they had worked to its disadvantage. The attitude of mind was a very important political fact. For because everyone, for want of a better creed, believed the economy to be unmanageable, the ministers were not held responsible for the quirks of its behaviour. Squire Western's resolutions on agricultural distress in 1816 cast no aspersions on the government. Brougham's on trade and manufacturing and his address on the state of the country the year following did, but even his friends grudged him their support and he was soundly caned for his presumptuousness as a result.¹ A century to come, as soon as governments accepted a responsibility for permanent prosperity, a depression became an unmitigated political disaster which those in power counted themselves lucky to survive. At this time, however, even one which lingered on for three years or more, remained nothing more than a serious embarrassment. No government yet

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xciii. 55-6, xxiv. 1044, xvi. 1392-6.

had succumbed to economic adversity.

Political issue or no, controllable or uncontrollable, the economy's vagaries had to be observed, and this the ministers did in rough and ready fashion. The usual indicators of distress or wellbeing were the revenue returns, the trade figures, the rate of exchange, the state of the funds and the price of corn. These were given much greater weight than they actually deserved. The official value of imports and exports, for example, based on prices current at the end of the seventeenth century, bore little relation to their real value, so much so that in the period 1815-18 exports and re-exports were underestimated by ten and imports by one hundred per cent. In 1817 an official trade surplus of £19,000,000 was really a deficit of almost £8,000,000. Without the government knowing, it was the invisible earnings of banking, shipping and insurance which were keeping the country out of the red.¹ Nor was the cost of living indexed by the price of corn as the ministers were wont to believe. They spoke of an "Approximation, which must take place, of the Price of all Articles of Consumption to that of Grain" when in fact the opposite might occur. In the latter half of 1817 some agricultural and most industrial prices continued to rise notwithstanding a spectacular slump in the price of wheat. No account was taken of wages either, though over the whole post-war period these by no means kept pace with a falling cost of living.² But above all, in 1817 at least, the

- 1 Albert H. Ingh, "Real Values in British Foreign Trade, 1798-1853," Journal of Economic History, viii (1948). 148; "British Balance of Payments and Export of Capital, 1816-1913," Economic History Review, 2nd series, v (1952-3). 234.
- 2 Lord Sidmouth to Lord Sheffield, 21 January 1816, Sidmouth MSS; Gay, Rostow and Schwartz, The Growth and Fluctuation of the British Economy, 1790-1850, 1. 140-3, 167-8.

government's information confused the expectation of recovery with the fact. As soon as good harvests seemed assured both at home and on the Continent, the mercantile world went into a frenzy of buying and selling, banking of course on a resurgent demand. This made the trade figures and revenue returns look deceptively favourable. Imports and home exports went up twelve and a half per cent on the previous year while the net revenue for the last two quarters produced over £3,000,000 more than the first two.¹ Throughout the prorogation members of the government joyfully bandied about the latest bulletins of the economy's glowing health.² No one thought for a moment that the spurt being speculative would peter out within a year, that the country was riding for a fall through overproduction and overtrading. The figures were taken as accurate because no other yardstick existed.

Fortune, it must have seemed to the ministers, could not have smiled on the government at a better time. With a solitary exception no parliament had lasted more than six years since 1768, fifty years before, which made a general election almost certain in the months to come, and a House waiting on a dissolution always took some handling as members were anxious to gratify their constituents at the last possible moment.³ Had the country faced yet another year of distress, issues like the poor laws, parliamentary reform, public order and public

1 PP, 1818, xii. 252, xiv. 11.

2 See Huskisson to Lord Liverpool, 19 September 1817, Lord Liverpool to Huskisson, 9 August, to Peel, 30 September 1817, Add. MSS. 38191, ff. 106-8, 38741, ff. 112-13, 40181, ff. 122-3; Lord Liverpool to Canning, 20 September 1817, Canning MSS.

3 The exception was the parliament of 1784-90 which lasted six years and a month. The existing parliament had been elected in November 1812.

spending would have made parliament incorrigible if not openly rebellious. Prosperity, on the other hand, drained any protest of passion and purpose. Equally propitious, was the way events appeared to bear out the government's earlier perspicacity and courage. Almost the first words parliament heard when it reassembled was a smug reminder that the ministers had repeatedly ascribed the depression to "temporary causes" and that now they were proved right.¹ Furthermore, the Pentridge rising in June had been the last overt attempt at revolution, and while the improving economic situation may have done more than anything else to settle the country it was still fair to say that extraordinary powers had helped. Certainly, the failure of the prosecution at the trials of Watson, Thistlewood and other miscreants showed only too plainly the inadequacies of the normal legal process.² Perhaps the ministers had worked no miracles themselves, but they had not been the false prophets many had made them out to be.

A development of a different sort made the government's joy complete. On the best authority, that of Lord Buckingham himself, the ministers learnt for sure that the Grenvilles and the Whigs had finally parted company. The news, admittedly, must have come as no great surprise. The two had never run well in harness, each being hopelessly out of step with the other over the war, parliamentary reform and domestic revolution; and though the return of peace and parliament's subsequent preoccupation with financial questions temporarily disguised this incompatibility, it was again apparent immediately

1 See the Prince Regent's Speech, 27 January 1818, CJ, lxxiii. 3-4.

2 True bills of indictment for high treason were found against five of the Spa Fields conspirators, but when the first brought up for trial was acquitted, the Crown declined to produce evidence against the others. At York assizes in July 1817 ten rioters charged with burglary, robbery and aiding and abetting attempted murder were all found not guilty. Prosecutions in Scotland were equally unsuccessful.

the national security became an issue in 1817. Like the ministers the Grenvilles were too impressed with the threat of revolution to have faith in half measures, and the habit of political co-operation with the Whigs was forgotten the moment their conservative conscience summoned them. "I cannot but think," Lord Buckingham told his uncle, "that the moment is arrived when as honest men we are bound to state our concurrence in one set of principles, and our difference from another, upon the adoption of the one or the other of which in these difficult times depends as we all believe the safety of the Country."¹ In fact, the difference of opinion was not as serious as he liked to believe. There were plenty of moderate Whigs who felt the same about sedition as he did, and in the past the party had had to learn to live with its dissensions or perish. Indeed, Lord Grenville was reassuring Grey that they were still political friends soon after the secret committee on which he sat reported back to the House of Lords.²

It was Buckingham, a restless quadragenarian with few qualifications for the political glory he thirsted for, who sought the break, and circumstances so favoured him that in the end he got his way. As early as July 1815 his mood was not to "conscientiously embark again in systematic opposition to Ministers," being convinced in his own mind that the variance with the Whigs over the Bourbon restoration was "a vital distinction upon public principles" and "a disunion of political party." A year and a half later he came to the conclusion that the Grenvilles and their allies were in total disagreement: "... surely,"

1 Lord Buckingham to Lord Grenville, 9 February 1817, Grenville MSS.

2 Austin Mitchell, The Whigs in Opposition, 1815-30, p.106.

he argued, "it would be better at once to take our line, than to sustain the odium attending principles which are abhorrent to our own, and the giving apparent sanction & support to a party with which upon every point now of policy we differ!"¹ None of his relations put up a strong resistance to the idea of separation. Charles Williams-Wynn, the leader of the coterie in the House of Commons, who might have been expected to know the state of the parties best, regarded himself as a political greenhorn who could do no better than take the advice of his maternal uncles, Lord Grenville and his brother Thomas. They for their part took the view that the day of younger men had arrived, that Buckingham as the succeeding paterfamilias should be allowed to play the game his own way. "I am sure I have no right, & I know not why I should have any wish, to restrain him from doing what he thinks best," Lord Grenville wrote in April 1817.² It was probably this sudden spasm of self-assertion by his nephew which finally persuaded him to announce his retirement from serious politics.³ Always punctilious of honour in public life, he was the last person to want accusations of desertion bandied about, and the death of Ponsonby, who as leader in the House of Commons had been the choice of both Grenvilles and Whigs, banished what few inhibitions remained about compromising old loyalties. Though Buckingham had seen little future in "a party of occasional support and occasional opposition" at the beginning of the session, before its close the whole family was enthusiastic for a declaration of political independence. This was done at the first possible opportunity.

1 Lord Buckingham to Lord Grenville, 16 July 1815, 9 February 1817, Grenville MSS.

2 Lord Grenville to Thomas Grenville, 16 April 1817, Add. MSS. 41853, f.359.

3 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxvi. 1013.

Immediately parliament resumed in January 1818 Williams-Wynn seated his tiny following on a bench apart from the rest of the opposition. Whether his army, as Buckingham jocularly called it, with its "general, five men & a drummer of great experience" could attract recruits, remained to be seen. Certainly, the new party, in Williams-Wynn's words, had no distinguishing principle other than "general disapprobation of rebellion & want of confidence in Ministers."¹

The government, of course, took a lively interest in reports of Grenville discontent, because while occasional co-operation could provide no great addition of numbers or speaking talent, it was bound to be a constant reminder of the opposition's disarray, even its immoderation if the departure of the conservative Grenvilles allowed "the Mountain" a larger say in Whig counsels. From time to time discreet inquiries were made to find out how matters stood. Lord Buckingham reported one such conversation in April 1817, but what he was sanguine enough to believe was an offer of office his uncle called "some coarse wishes ... expressed to him as matter of compliment, or thrown out without any meaning at all."² A few days later, however, Grenville himself was favoured with advance copies of the government's place and pension bills, and sometime during the summer he was drawn into a discussion on the financial situation by a Treasury official he had come to know while premier in 1806-7, an account of which was duly passed on

- 1 Lord Buckingham to Lord Grenville, 13 February 1817, Grenville MSS; Lord Grenville to Charles Williams-Wynn, 2 July 1817, Charles Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 1 July, 19 November 1817, Lord Buckingham to Charles Williams-Wynn, 2 July, 15 September 1817, Coed-y-maen MSS.; Buckingham, Regency, ii.211-13.
- 2 Lord Grenville to Thomas Grenville, 16 April 1817, Add. MSS. 41853, f.357.

to Lord Liverpool who no doubt was interested to see how Grenville's ideas largely coincided with his own.¹ Towards the end of the year the government definitely made up its mind to co-operate with the Grenvilles whenever possible. Probably the decision was reached in December when the old flirtation with Buckingham was renewed, for he could keep no secret and made it quite clear that the rupture with the Whigs was absolute and final.²

Once begun, the new friendship looked immensely promising. Harrison of the Treasury, the same intermediary of the summer, had a long interview with Buckingham on 24 January 1818, and after going over government policy for the ensuing session in general terms they found themselves in almost perfect agreement.³ In all likelihood the ministers interpreted this as Buckingham's relations angrily did, as an "implied pledge of co-operation."⁴ There certainly was no reason to think that Buckingham had spoken out of order. Lord Grenville's explanation that having retired from active politics the overture was unacceptable to him personally, while protecting his nephew from a public embarrassment, made it natural to conclude that the latter had acted on his own good authority as party leader.⁵

- 1 Lord Liverpool to Lord Grenville, 25 April 1817, *ibid.*, 38266, ff. 53-4; Lord Buckingham to Lord Grenville, 26 January 1818, Grenville MSS; Buckingham, Regency, ii. 207.
- 2 Lord Buckingham to Charles Williams-Wynn, 17 December 1817, Coed-y-maen MSS.
- 3 George Harrison, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, "Memorandum of a Conversation with the Marquis of Buckingham, Saturday 24 Jany. 1818," Add. MSS. 38367, ff. 235-41; Lord Buckingham to Lord Grenville, 26 January 1818, Grenville MSS.
- 4 Charles Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 28 January 1818, Coed-y-maen MSS.; Buckingham, Regency, ii. 204-8.
- 5 Lord Grenville to George Harrison, 28 January 1818, Grenville MSS. For his anxiety to avoid appearing to reprove Buckingham see Lord Grenville to Charles Williams-Wynn, 28 January 1818, Coed-y-maen MSS.; Buckingham, Regency, ii. 209.

As a result, the government felt and had every right to feel cock-a-hoop. If the Grenvilles were gullible enough to compromise their independence by accepting confidential communications from official men, they were never likely to become a formidable third party. Dissociated from the main body of the opposition, but still professing to be in opposition, they needed to oppose to survive, and then on principles not merely details. From 1801-5 Grenville had kept his connexion intact by denouncing the pacific inclinations of Pittites and Foxites alike. From 1818 his successor wasted his inheritance on general support of the ministers interrupted by an occasional petty opposition. To suggest, as Williams-Wynn suggested, that "general disapprobation of rebellion & want of confidence in Ministers" gave the Grenvilles a separate identity was nonsense. Sedition was an issue which only cropped up now and again, and even irregular voting on the government side hardly manifested a dissatisfaction or displeasure with those in power. The fact of the matter was that the Grenvilles never did and never could have become an effective third party because they had neither a cause nor leaders to inspire one. Their true sympathies lay with the government and inevitably they drifted into its orbit, so that apart from an occasional confidence their support cost the ministers nothing. "It is much more for the interest of the Ministers," Grenville had written in April 1817, "to receive the sort of assistance which naturally results from our acting upon our own notorious, & unchanged, opinions, without any junction, real or apparent, than to have to make arrangements for admitting & satisfying the claims of a new set of adherents."¹ In the event he could not have been more right.

1 Lord Grenville to Thomas Grenville, 16 April 1817, Add. MSS. 41853, f.358.

The Whigs themselves shed no tears at the Grenvilles' going. If there were regrets they were sentimental rather than serious, for in this case the loss of a dozen votes in the Commons was well worth the corresponding gain in party accord. Indeed, in one respect the separation perhaps seemed almost providential. With an election close at hand and preparations already underway, a spirited showing in parliament was eminently desirable, and this an opposition of friends had a much better chance of doing than a coalition of fellow-travellers. Fortunately for the government the Whigs, bedevilled by inept leadership and thoroughly out of sorts after long years in the political wilderness, still searched in vain for an explicit identity. Having exhausted, it seemed, the potentialities of the new situation created by peace, they lapsed into a state of supineness and indifference, content to live on past glories and wait on events. Before the Easter recess they were lucky to get sixty votes in a division, and in the dog days of the session half that. Thwarted in their main line of attack by the government's readiness to lift the suspension of habeas corpus, which they might easily have guessed would happen, their opposition to the bill indemnifying magistrates and others for their use of emergency powers and their motions against spies and informers became little more than a stultifying rehash of the previous session's debates.¹ Even economy seemed a horse scarcely worth flogging, for once again a select committee told the country gentlemen all they wanted to know. Significantly,

1 See Williams-Wynn's comment, Buckingham, Regency, ii. 236: "The House is very dull, and the debates flat. We have nothing but the hashed-up Habeas Corpus and Indemnity, which really is stewed and devoured to the bare bones."

when a tax on leather did come under heavy fire from interested parties, a stern appeal to save the revenue succeeded, despite an initial government defeat and parliament's notorious sensitivity to questions of this sort in an election year.

Even so, the ministers did suffer one major setback, and it did concern expenditure, the old bugbear of royal expenditure at that. But as they brought it wholly on themselves the success was hardly the opposition's. The birth of a still-born child to Princess Charlotte followed shortly afterwards by her own deeply lamented death left George III's twelve surviving sons and daughters without a single legitimate heir. Worse still, while the Prince Regent's bachelor brothers appeared to lack none of the voracious sexuality of the Hanoverian ilk, even the youngest were well in their forties. "We are thrown quite out to sea," Lord Liverpool wrote in dismay, "and there is no expedient to which we can look with real satisfaction."¹ The least that could be done was to find matches for the unmarried royal dukes without undue delay, and in this connection the ministers lost no time in impressing each with a proper sense of his public responsibility, Lord Liverpool going so far as to urge the Prince Regent to a brotherly intervention.² The main bother was the Duke of Clarence, the eldest and therefore the nearest to the throne, for Cambridge who was already paying addresses to a princess of Hesse-Cassel was accepted at once and Kent was equally successful with a widow of Leiningen not long afterwards. Fifty-two years old, up to his ears in debt and the devoted father of ten illegitimate children, Clarence, as he himself quickly found out, was hardly Europe's most eligible bachelor, and he stubbornly refused to put public duty before

¹ Liverpool, II. 322.

² George IV, II. 225.

private comfort. A memorandum of his terms which the Prince Regent's private secretary passed on to the Prime Minister included a town house, an allowance of £40,000, an outfit of £22,000 and the writing off of £17,000 of debt. These demands, made shortly before Caroline of Denmark was selected from the catalogue of Protestant princesses, forced the Cabinet to make what in retrospect must have seemed a regretfully hasty decision, for in conceding all of them except the house, and agreeing at the same time to allowances of £30,000 for the younger princes, the ministers committed themselves in advance on a highly delicate question.¹ Since the death of Princess Charlotte and the final liquidation of the Prince Regent's debts saved the consolidated fund from any additional charge, the economy of the proposal was irreproachable. Nor was it lacking in precedent. When the Duke of York had been in such the same situation Clarence now was, Pitt had treated him even more generously. The great trouble was that parliament shared a pronounced dislike of George III's disreputable brood with the rest of the country, and the excuse that the times were exigent and that an election was near was an opportunity of paying off old scores too good to miss. Wellington's exasperated comment must be accepted as typical: "They [the royal dukes] are the damndest millstone about the necks of any Government that can be imagined," he told a Whig acquaintance. "They have insulted - personally insulted - two-thirds of the gentlemen of England, and how can it be wondered at that they take their revenge upon them when they get them in the House of Commons?"²

Not that the government threw caution completely to the winds. After polite refusals at two foreign courts and a

1 Ibid., pp.227, 236-8.

2 Cresvey Papers, i. 277.

brief infatuation for a rich Oxfordshire heiress which the ministers and his brothers bullied him out of, Clarence was able to announce his engagement to Adelaide of Saxo-Meiningen, and the morning before the royal message was sent down to the Commons about eighty junior ministers and country gentlemen were invited to Fife House to hear what it was proposed to vote him and his brothers. The purpose of the meeting was not that of a party caucus. The sixty or seventy who turned up listened in silence and departed in silence. Because governments depended on the support of those who professed independence to be the way of political righteousness, a rank and file consultation on policy was completely out of the question; and instead, ministers had to guess the likely reaction of the House and if they guessed wrong think again. Parliament indeed remained deliberative in the best sense of the word, for there Cabinet decisions ran the test of supporters and opposition at one and the same time. On this occasion rumours of disapproval had been making the rounds and the government was anxious to ascertain the feelings of the country gentlemen to avoid the embarrassment of a parliamentary defeat. As it was, the cool reception which greeted the proposals together with private hints from friends who stayed behind left the Cabinet in no doubt. The allowances had to be reduced, whatever insult was done the royal dukes by publicly admitting their unpopularity.¹

To suggest, then, that the government was browbeaten

¹ Colchester, iii. 43; Peel, i. 262-3; Buckingham, Regency, ii. 254-5; A. Aspinall, "English Party Organisation in the Early Nineteenth Century," English Historical Review, xli (1926). 393. A list of members among the Liverpool Papers is almost certainly a list of those invited. It contains 79 names including 20 official members. Add. MSS. 38366, f.133. It is interesting to note that Charles Williams-Wynn is not included, though Thorneycroft told the House he had been sent a letter of invitation. Hansard, 1st ser., xxxviii. 42.

into submission the night the message was brought down is quite untenable. Enough opinions had already been collected to show that friends whether in or out of office were in two minds, and the fighting talk of half a dozen backbenchers on the floor of the House only strengthened this conclusion. On moving the address of thanks to the Crown Castlereagh was deliberately non-controversial, saying nothing of measures arising, ostensibly because the courtesy was a mere formality. Nor was it shameful, as the opposition tried to pretend, to have to revise measures which parliament officially or unofficially already knew about. This sort of shuffle was inevitable when no caucus existed to thrash out differences with the rank and file. The real embarrassment was when the House of Commons rejected the Cabinet's amendments. A meeting at Pife House the day after the message was presented agreed in principle to reduction but waited to hear from the Duke of Clarence before going further, in itself an awkward delay because the usual practice was to take royal messages into immediate consideration. As soon as he consented to an additional allowance half the original sum, however, the ministers needed no other excuse to treat his brothers likewise, and since this would save £22,000 on the consolidated fund they had fair grounds for assuming parliament's gracious acquiescence. Where they went wrong was to forget or miscomprehend the chronic unpopularity of the royal family, always excepting the pathetic old king and his matriarchal consort. Clarence, who retired after an undistinguished naval career to preside over a menage of illegitimate children, was regarded as an out and out buffoon, and though he had special claims for distinction as the eldest of the unmarried dukes parliament flatly refused to grant the larger allowance which the government urged on his behalf. Cumberland also felt the full weight of its disapprobation. In 1815 he had married a

princess whom the Queen declined to receive, and now as then the Commons on the strength of this snub denied him any marital income whatever. Only Cambridge and Kent, probably with Sussex the best-loved of all the brothers, were treated as generously as the government wished. All in all, on the eve of an election it was a very unfortunate episode. Because the House in this instance necessarily professed more interest in economies than casting aspersions on "illustrious persons," the impression remained that the government had fallen back into old errors all too easily. "If the public necessity interposed," a prominent country gentleman had thundered during the debates, "the royal dukes, in common with every other description of persons in the country, must yield to the pressure of the times." This the ministers had not seemed ready to do with the result that for the first time since the defeat of the property tax they had been beaten on a point of economy in a full House.¹

How serious the mistake really was, probably only dawned on the government after the election in June. For that exhibition of summer madness despite improving economic prospects and thoroughgoing retrenchments, made it plain that the people were still wont to see the country's misfortunes as the direct result of the government's iniquities. Such was their dudgeon that in Great Britain the election saw more contests than any other before 1832, even though one object of a premature dissolution was to avoid precisely this nuisance. Canning, fresh off the hustings at Liverpool, could not help wondering whether the parliament ought to have been allowed to die a natural death: "I thought & think that those of our friends who may have had to fight battles as hard as mine, but with less certainty &

¹ Bathurst, pp.447-8; Hansard, 1st ser., xlviii. 1-13, 23-31, 40-7, 51-74, 76-154, 725-34.

at more expence, will feel that they have been exposed to popular obloquy & violence by twelve months unnecessarily too soon - not to mention the chance that in twelve months the publick mind might have become more tranquillized."¹ Not that a waning popularity could be read in the actual result. When most of the English returns were in, Arbuthnot totted up twenty-five gains and thirty-five losses, while about a week later, after the government's better showing in Scotland and Ireland, Croker surmised a net loss of seven or eight.² Of course, with over 150 maiden members and many others notoriously non-party, it was all very much a guessing game. Arbuthnot's opposite number, Lord Duncannon, estimated a Whig gain of twenty to twenty-five, which led Tierney to declare "175 members so decidedly in opposition as to desire to have notes sent to them."³ Only the first trial of strength in the new House would prove who was right and who was wrong.

It was what Canning called "the spirit of the general return" which was particularly disconcerting.⁴ Except at Liverpool where he and General Gascoyne held off a determined Whig assault, the government made little or no impression in the largest constituencies. The City of London displaced two friendly independents, Southwark showed a renegade Whig who had supported the suspension of habeas corpus scant mercy, and for once, even a naval hero - a protege of Admiral Hood, a former

1 Canning to Lord Liverpool, 25 June 1818, Canning MSS.

2 Portesque, x. 441; Croker to Peel, 9 July 1818, Add. MSS. 40184, f. 233. For other progress reports and surmises see Lord Liverpool to Lord Talbot, 18 June 1818, *ibid.*, 38272, f. 160; Croker to Peel, 1 July 1818, *ibid.*, 40184, f. 210; Lord Liverpool to Huskisson, 2 July 1818, Canning to Huskisson, 5 July 1818, *ibid.*, 38741, ff. 226, 229-30; Buckingham, Regency, ii. 265.

3 Portesque, x. 441, 442.

4 Canning to Lord Liverpool, 25 June, 2, 5 July 1818, Canning MSS.

member, to boot - retired baffled from Westminster. Most provoking of all, a contest in Devonshire saw a Whig stalwart head the poll and Acland, a leading country gentleman, beaten into third place. Huskisson, pondering the results at his country retreat in Sussex, came to the conclusion that the government was sadly out of touch. As he told Lord Liverpool in successive letters:

... I cannot be indifferent to what the Opposition (not the Whigs but the high popular Party) will consider as a triumph in so many populous indications of their strength. It is a bad symptom, and will, I am afraid, have an influence with many of our well disposed Friends on all trying questions. The low periodical press has everywhere done more mischief than many are disposed to admit. I can trace it among our yeomanry in this County. They despise the Whigs; but they are no longer what they were ten years ago in their attachment to the old Tory interests and principles which are prevalent in the Nobility & Gentry.

Be assured that the feeling is strong in the Country, that we have not done enough The old Remark that a Ministry enjoying the cordial good will of the Sovereign is best for War, but unfitted for Peace, and especially with the present Sovereign, is making way among many well meaning People, notwithstanding all their apprehensions of the other possible consequences of not supporting the present Administration. I venture to say this much to you generally; because I am convinced that without great prudence in the Regent's Expenditure, and something more than has hitherto been done to diminish that of the State, you will feel the bad consequences in the new Parlt - and in public opinion, which is after all the power to which we must look for any durably prevailing influence in P[arliament] itself.¹

Huskisson cannot have been alone in this heart-searching of course. Doubtless there were plenty of others who read Lord Liverpool the same lecture, for anyone could see the government had lost mightily in prestige if nothing else. The truly sobering thought was that "economy and reduction" continued to

¹ Huskisson to Lord Liverpool, 3, 9 July 1818, Add. MSS. 38191, ff. 112, 113-14.

be "the passions of the day," and that on this score the people had been much less easily satisfied than their representatives. The issue was not going to be an ephemeral one, part and parcel of the return to peace, after all. Indeed, the new parliament was likely to prosecute the inquiry even more zealously than its predecessor, especially at the outset when the ministers could least afford a defeat and a full attendance gave the unattached members an excessive importance. "We could never work up against a serious defeat upon an important question at the beginning of the Parliament," Lord Liverpool warned one of his colleagues.¹ Once again, economising seemed to be a precondition of political survival.

Work began on the estimates in the middle of July, immediately Lord Castlereagh arrived back from electioneering in Ireland. There was no time for delay because in September he was due to attend the conference of European powers at Aix-la-Chapelle, and not knowing how long he would be away the Prime Minister was anxious to have the most important decisions settled before he left. Both agreed that the best way to enforce reductions was to set each service an arbitrary maximum - £6,000,000 for the navy, £8,700,000 for the army and £1,100,000 for the ordnance excluding whatever might be fetched by the sale of unwanted property and old stores. Fortunately, in no instance did the departments prove uncooperative. The Master-General of the Ordnance felt distinctly unhappy about the stingy sums allotted for works and the reduction of depots in the West Indies, but he was enough of a politician to appreciate the necessity of the times even if his professionalism was outraged by the suggestion that superiority at sea excused a neglect of

1 Bathurst, p.456.

local defence.¹ The Duke of York too was no less compliant, perhaps surprisingly so, because remembering previous tussles on the subject the ministers frankly admitted their chariness in broaching it anew.² On this occasion what differences there were merely concerned the relative strengths of the cavalry and infantry, not the reduction itself.³ Where the Commander-in-Chief argued the cavalry's greater usefulness and the difficulty of replacing a corps once broken, the ministers pointed to its disproportionate expense; a regiment of dragoons with 288 mounted and 80 dismounted rank and file, such as he wanted, cost £6,400 more than an infantry battalion of 650. Honour was satisfied on both sides by dismounting a further five men from each troop and reducing another regiment. This left the army with eleven more regiments and battalions than the 1818 establishment had borne, but 9,000 fewer men, an arrangement which saved £268,000 on the estimates and also made any sudden augmentation comparatively easy.⁴

1 Wellington, Sup Desp., xii. 860-3.

2 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 6 August 1818, Add. MSS. 38273, ff. 14-20.

3 There was a meeting between the ministers and the Duke of York on 7 August 1818. At it he was told the sum which the estimates were on no account to exceed, "from the absolute necessity of a great diminution in the general expenditure of the Country" and irrespective of "the Force which might be deemed necessary to secure these Realms and the Colonies from Foreign Insult." He replied that he thought it "His duty not to intrude upon Them any opinion of His own upon that head." Memorandum, 28 August 1818, *ibid.*, 38368, ff. 25-32.

4 For the discussion see memoranda by the Duke of York, 20, 28 August; Arbuthnot to Huskisson, 3 September; memorandum, probably by "Mr Hill of the Treasury," /October/; Lord Bathurst to Lord Liverpool, 8 October; Lord Liverpool to Lord Bathurst, 9 October; memorandum, 12 October; Hill to Lord Liverpool, 13 October; memorandum submitted to the Prince Regent, 21 October 1818, *ibid.*, 38273, ff. 297-9, 314-18; 38368, ff. 25-32; 38741, ff. 253-4; 48434, pp. 86-136; Bathurst, p. 457.

Of the three services the navy alone found it impossible to keep within the sum proscribed by the government. For that no fault lay with the Admiralty. Lord Liverpool was the first to admit that Lord Melville had been his usual obliging self.¹ The insuperable difficulty was the fast deteriorating condition of the fleet, a problem Melville was still wrestling with in his last days as First Lord. Slapdash workmanship in the haste of war, aggravated by constant seagoing and less durable Canadian timber, brought home hundreds of rotting ships which the overworked and probably inefficient dockyards had no hope of coping with. Rather than attempt such a mammoth repair job, between 1814 and 1820, 552 ships were sold or broken up, and in roughly the same period only 70 were launched.² Little wonder that at the beginning of 1818 the Navy Board reported 146 frigates and ships of the line in a seaworthy condition where two years before the Admiralty had dreamt of having 260.³ Any economy under the head of building and repairs then was wholly out of the question as far as naval administrators were concerned, and Melville was not wide of the mark when he thought parliament would never condone it either. "There is no object upon which the House will be less disposed to call for a parsimonious expenditure" was the Finance Committee's comment on plans for "a complete renovation of the Fleet."⁴ In the other estimates impressive cuts were equally impossible: war or peace the transport service had to shift stores, convicts and troops; dockyard and harbour improvement

1 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 6 August 1818, Add. MSS. 38273, f.17.

2 C.J. Bartlett, Great Britain and Sea Power, 1815-53, p.24; PP, 1825, xxi. 331-9.

3 Croker to the Navy Board, 8 December 1815, the Navy Board to Croker, 18 February 1818, NLS MSS. 1044, ff.158-63, 224-6.

4 PP, 1817, iv. 221. Lord Melville to Lord Liverpool, 28 July 1818, Add. MSS. 38272, ff.334-42.

while costs were down was commonsense; and the civil establishment was already pared to the bone thanks to parliament's special jealousy. The most that could be done was to reduce the number of seamen, even though merchant bodies were constantly petitioning for better protection and complaints of undermanning kept coming in from admirals on foreign stations.¹ The fact that the establishment of 19,000 voted in 1817 had not lasted beyond the year was itself an earnest of the difficulties involved. Still, with Sir George Cockburn's assistance, Melville did go so far as to draw up a plan, only to scrap it when its impracticability became more and more obvious.² After this, the government, however loath, had to admit defeat and glumly make the most of estimates £500,000 above what was wanted. There was a will, but simply no way.

One other saving, important in effect rather than amount, was brought into discussion by the death of Queen Charlotte on 17 November 1818. An act of 1812 had ordered £10,000 to be paid her out of the civil list for the expense and responsibility she would bear as custog of the King's person, and her decease without making it possible to dispense with the appointment did give the ministers a welcome opportunity to moderate the grotesque and pathetic pantomime which had been carried on at Windsor throughout the Regency. By this time, when George III's doctors wholly despaired of a return to reason, a household of twelve officers of state and one hundred and thirty other servants seemed ludicrously large for a lunatic king living in absolute seclusion and, worse, at £100,000 a year a deplorable waste of public money. Already, particularly with respect to

1 Ibid.

2 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 6 August 1818, *ibid.*, f.17. In 1819 20,000 seamen and marines were voted, the same establishment as the preceding year's.

the cost, murmurings had been heard, notably during the debates on the ducal allowances in April 1818 when the opposition dared to point out that cold mutton and no company were realising an immense private treasure which could be used to offset the extraordinary expense of two royal establishments.¹

Strangely enough though, it was George III's fortune which constituted the chief stumbling block to drastic reductions at Windsor. The moment the government suggested the appropriation of part of the Privy Purse the Prince Regent and the Duke of York were up in arms, refusing to see their inheritance wasted on what they conceived was a public responsibility. In their view the Purse's annual receipt of £60,000, not forgetting £10,000 more from the Duchy of Lancaster, was and "has ever been considered the private property of the Sovereign of these realms, perfectly at his own disposal and free from the control and cognizance of Parliament," though equally cogent for them as the nearest in line to the throne was the almost certain knowledge that their father had left no will.² Whether in fact constitutional proprieties were against the ministers was difficult to say. Whatever the other encroachments on the royal revenue, up to 1811 the Privy Purse had indubitably remained "the King's own." The Regency Act of that year, however, gave the Keeper of the Purse authority to pay out a limited sum and invest the rest in government securities, and that of 1812 went even further. It declared the King's medical expenses to be a legitimate charge and ordered previous surpluses to aid current deficits should the need ever arise. Some contended that this established parliament's "whole dominion" for all time, since in effect the legislature had taken upon itself

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxviii. 63, 70, 109-13.

2 39 & 40 Geo. III c.88 provided that if the King died intestate his private property should pass to the Crown.

to say what was to be spent and where. Others, including the ministers, construed it as the right of the nation to disburse Privy Purse money if the sovereign's will and pleasure is "unfortunately not only for a time suspended, but in fact for ever closed." Others yet again argued that parliament could do no more than interpret the King's wishes in the strictest possible sense, only spending where he had spent in full possession of his faculties. This last, of course, was the safest ground. Both Regency Acts stated categorically that the Privy Purse was to be put to accustomed uses, and doctors' fees had been included in its charge and surpluses given over to commissioners of the King's property accordingly. Moreover, since strictly speaking the maintenance of the royal state was the concern of the civil list, in trying to meet the expense of the Windsor establishment from the personal revenue of the Crown the government was departing from a time-honoured rule which it itself had confirmed, implicitly at least. Probably for this reason Lord Liverpool from the start showed a distinct unwillingness to argue the point. All he and his colleagues could really urge in extenuation of their impertinence was the likely hostility of parliament to any laying up of treasure and the construction of personal interest which public opinion was sure to put upon the same. But not surprisingly, when the Prince Regent stuck to his guns they soon capitulated. If rumours of the King's intestacy were indeed true, the accumulations of the Privy Purse were left to George IV's future enjoyment.

Inasmuch as nothing was forthcoming from the personal funds of the Crown, the ministers became more determined than ever to make savings on the civil list proper. The termination of the Queen's annuity released £58,000, less the appropriate pensions and allowances to officers of her household and old servants, but so vague were the precedents in this connec-

tion - only one Queen Consort had died in the previous century, and after her death salaries had been continued in full - that the Cabinet was quite happy to let a select parliamentary committee settle the precise amount. As for the establishment at Windsor, the ministers bluntly demanded an estimate of £50,000 per annum from the Master of the Household, exactly half the sum fixed in 1812. Predictably, Carlton House responded by accusing them of denigrating the essential dignity of the Crown. The Regency Act, it was maintained, had assumed the remote possibility of the King's recovery and for that reason alone he ought to continue surrounded by the full panoply of his exalted station: as the Duke of York asserted, "painful sensations ... must ... be created in his Majesty's breast should he upon his recovery find that any great alterations had taken place during the time that he was alleged to be released from the care of public business." To this the ministers made the obvious retort. After seven years it was safe to say the King was dead to this world, and if nothing was recommended in the way of reductions parliament would take the law into its own hands whether they or anyone else liked it or not. Luckily, it did not take much to make the Prince Regent see reason. He himself held no illusions about his personal unpopularity and fully understood the mania for economy, and having made his point over the Privy Purse no doubt this time he felt discretion to be the better part of valour. The last details of the Windsor estimate were settled shortly after parliament reassembled¹

1 For these two paragraphs see Bathurst, pp.460, 461-6; George IV, ii. 262-3, 265. Particulars of the King's establishment are to be found in PP, 1819, ii. 53-9. It is difficult to say exactly when the government finally decided not to touch the Privy Purse. Bankes, who sat on the select committee, said Castlereagh proposed to charge it with the allowances of the princesses and the pensions of the Queen's servants. Williams-Wynn, on the other hand, got an alto-

The great issue of the session, the government anticipated, was going to be monetary policy. While sweeping reductions at Windsor and elsewhere were guaranteed to spoil the opposition's usual party piece, on the further restriction of cash payments public feeling was running much too high for parliament to stay quiet. Originally, or rather after five successive re-enactments of the suspension, the law had inferred a resumption six months after a peace had been ratified but one way and another the Bank and the government had secured postponements until July 1819, not least because in the Bullion Committee's famous report of 1810 their opponents themselves seemed to admit that the necessary preliminaries would take two years. To many, however, the delay was a flagrant breach of faith and a crying injustice. As long as paper remained inconvertible into gold a disparity in their values was avoidable only if the issues of the one were carefully regulated according to the market price of the other, and this the Bank had manifestly failed to do. When the galloping inflation of the war period reached its height in 1813 the paper pound was worth 14s. 2d. in terms of gold. Three years later an equally severe deflation returned it to 19s. 10d. The debtor could not help being hurt by such a fluctuation, for mortgages, rents, insurance, any money transaction contracted while prices were high now had to be paid for in an appreciated currency.

1. gether different impression. There were certainly a number of ministerial meetings on the Windsor establishment just after the committee was appointed. Canning, at the Prince Regent's request, made a special trip to Brighton to talk over the matter as well. Colchester, iii. 69-70; Buckingham, Regency, ii. 327; Canning's diary, 4-8 February 1819, Canning MSS. Perhaps it is worth adding that in January the government vetoed the Prince Regent's plans for extending Buckingham House, Queen Charlotte's old residence, Liverpool, ii. 402-3; Sir Benjamin Bloomfield to Charles Arbuthnot, 17 January 1819, Add. MSS. 38275, ff.78-9.

Naturally, the losers, real or imagined, vented their spleen on the gainers, especially "the Old Hag of Threadneedle Street" and the investors in government stock. In parliament the opposition was for ever alluding to the Bank's record profits and accusing the directors of having a vested interest in restriction which in return for credit unlimited the government was too cowardly to resist by itself. In the press fundholders and bankers appeared a clan of extortioners whose rapacity knew no equal. Having lent money at one rate, they were being paid back double while the rest of the nation languished under a debt and taxes only nominally the same. Cobbett and company even declared the execution of forgers to be a slaughter of innocents, and Heaven itself would hold the monied interest accountable. Still, in the main the protest against the fluctuating value of money was a fair one. As Lord Grenville remarked, as long as it continued, "no class of society, from the highest to the lowest, could know what were their means, what their income, or their wages."¹

The ministers' misfortune was that they agreed to a man that a return to the gold standard was desirable, but differed irreconcilably over how to set about it. The bullionists and antibullionists in the government had taken up public positions on the question long before, and since a theoretical point was in dispute this made it next to impossible to find any middle ground. Canning and Huskisson refused to recant one word of the heresy they had embraced in 1810-11, emphatically maintaining that an uncontrolled expansion of credit depreciated the paper in circulation, raised the price of gold and turned the exchanges. Vansittart, Harrowby and others stuck just as stubbornly to the old ministerial view that bullion prices and the rate of exchange kept strictly in step with overseas spend-

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxviii. 928.

ing and the balance of trade. For them the prerequisites of resumption were not a check on note issues and a contraction of bank credit generally, but exchanges at or above par, a substantial gold reserve and a minimal capital export. Hitherto they had had the better of the argument. In 1816 there was bullion in plenty, the exchanges were near enough to par and the Bank, whose antibullionist notions were perfectly notorious, was given a free hand for the ensuing two years. Not a murmur came from Downing Street twelve months later when in complete defiance of the quantity theory of money banks everywhere began to increase their note issues regardless of the pound's weakening position. Indeed, the ministers seemed to encourage the Bank in its folly by their uninhibited borrowing, and when the period of grace finally expired to hear them complain of outgoing capital rather than "an excess of circulation" can hardly have come as any great surprise.¹ Nevertheless, some heed began to be taken of Huskisson's views because in May 1818 the government commenced a drastic reduction of the unfunded debt and the repayment of advances from the Bank, and these preliminaries not only supplied the right deflationary dose but also provided for a replenishment of treasure in anticipation of a renewed demand for gold. Even so, it was far from being a volte face. At £66,000,000 the unfunded debt was much too large for any government's liking, with money in abundance and the funds holding well there could be no better moment for a funding operation, and the Bank was always wanting to check its holdings of public securities in the belief that they precluded a proper assistance to the commercial community.² If the truth

1 The ministers emphasised the heavy corn imports in 1817-18 and the foreign loans floated in London. Ibid., xxxvii. 1232-7, xxxviii. 922-4, 939, 944.

2 "Memorandum enclosed in a letter from Lord Liverpool and Mr. Vansittart dated Fife House, 22 May 1818," PP, 1819, 111.29.

be known by 1819 the ministers were fast coming to their wits' ends. They knew irritation was mounting in the country, neither bullionist nor antibullionist stood proved or disproved, and after what had gone before resumption seemed as far off as ever. Everyone having grown tired of waiting, it was high time for pet theories to give way to political necessities.

The Bank itself was not under the thumb of financial fuddy-duddies as many liked to believe. Just how much bullionist fancies had caught on there was shown by the evidence later collected by secret committees of each House and in the debates which followed; of nine directors whose views became known six appeared to admit and three deny that the Bank's issues affected the exchanges.¹ On the other hand, they and "the Chairs" were first and foremost men of business not economic theorists, and as such, whatever their thinking, they had ample grounds for urging caution and restraint at the beginning of 1819. Notwithstanding a reduction in note issues and repayments totalling £5,000,000 by the government, the exchanges continued unfavourable with no sign of improvement,² the pound at Hamburg actually receiving its lowest quotation in February 1819. To return to

Huskisson listed the necessary preliminaries for resumption in a memorandum of 4 February 1819. Liverpool, ii. 382-4. A bill introduced in April 1818 to secure the issues of country banks against a deposit of government stock was no real concession to bullionist opinions. The Bullion Committee argued that because those issues were exchangeable for the Bank of England's they increased or diminished as its did. Huskisson elaborated this conclusion in his famous pamphlet The Question concerning the Depreciation of our Currency (1810). See PP, 1810, iii. 28; The Speeches of William Huskisson, i. 86-8.

- 1 J.K. Horsfield, "The Bankers and the Bullionists in 1819," Journal of Political Economy, lvii (1949). 442-8.
- 2 For the note circulation see PP, 1819, xvi. 375. The secret committees later discovered that the Bank's issues of commercial paper offset this diminution to a certain extent.

the gold standard in these conditions, especially when bullion would realise a handsome profit on export, was unthinkable. No one could forget an unfortunate experiment at partial resumption in 1817 when exchanges below par had created a demand which had been steadily emptying the vaults of the Bank ever since. Indeed, the present insufficiency of its treasure alone was enough to forbid a precipitate end to restriction. The most telling argument of all, however, was the attitude of the monied interest, hostile almost to a man and with good reason. Through the loans Barings had floated to help the French government meet its pecuniary obligations to the victorious Allies, a considerable amount of British capital had become tied up with the Paris bourse, and when this displayed symptoms of panic towards the end of 1818 inevitably the nervousness transferred itself across the Channel. Since resumption depended above all on the state of the exchanges, and the only conceivable way to turn these was by a stringent control of credit, what "commercial and monied people" most feared was a further blow to sagging confidence. Moreover, it seemed as if the deflation would have to be exceptionally severe, severe enough to cause "stagnation in trade and manufactures, depreciation of property, and general distress."¹ Not only was there little time left before the restriction was due to end, but payments on Barings' latest loan would continue to influence the exchanges throughout the year as would other foreign investments, for such was their profitability that British capital was unlikely to be deterred until the very last moment. When the choice lay between restriction and almost certain recession, the Bank was strongly inclined to leave well alone.

Fundamentally, the government's assessment of the

1 For petitions from merchants and bankers to this effect see CJ, lxxiv. 52, 59, 71, 72.

situation was no different. The decision to prolong the restriction, of course, was the Cabinet's not the Bank's, though the directors had every reason to expect their advice would be sought. Unbeknown to them, however, politicians and bankers had come to the parting of their ways. It was true that on 12 January 1819 the question was put to "the Chairs" whether the Bank could control the exchanges by July, but at the same meeting they learnt that resumption was postponed for a further seven months; and when the directorate's first representation on the subject did come three days afterwards it only tended an answer, a negative answer to the government's inquiry.¹ The difference between economic and political necessities became fully apparent during the week which followed. Since the restriction would now continue until February 1820, the Cabinet intended to insure themselves against parliamentary retribution by repaying as much of the advances as possible, by placing a statutory limitation on their future amount and by promising an inquiry in the event of yet another postponement.² The Bank slightly upset these plans on 15 January when the Governor insisted on renewing the Restriction Act until April 1820. As a compromise the ministers proposed March, though the change gave any inquiry an annoyingly late start.³ Worse was to come however. On 20 January the Committee of Treasury, the committee of the Court of Directors which handled government business, "considered the Improbability that the Foreign Exchanges will be turned and permanently settled in favour of Great Britain by March 1820" and came to the astonishing conclusion that "the Consequences of a Parlia-

1 See the Governor's evidence to the Common's committee on the resumption of cash payments. PP, 1819, iii.28, 29.

2 For Huskisson's exposition of the government's views see T.F. Lewis to Lord Grenville, 21 January 1819, Grenville MSS.

3 PP, 1819, iii.33.

mentary Enquiry" were preferable to a bill "inadequate to the Circumstances in which the Country may be placed."¹ This resolution was confirmed and slightly altered the following day and taken round to Fife House on the morning of 22 January. Not surprisingly, the deputation met with a cool reception. To tell the Prime Minister that it was "a Matter of the highest Importance that the Public shall not be deluded with an Expectation which is not likely to be realised" was bad enough. (Rumour said the expression had given "deadly offence.")² To blackmail the government into a change of policy was twenty times worse. The ministers had always regarded inquiry as distasteful inasmuch as bullionists and antibullionists would have been brought into open disagreement, but once the Bank publicly demanded one, having stoutly resisted the same for years, it would have looked both churlish and suspicious on their part to refuse. Left with no real choice in the matter, the Cabinet determined to take the directors at their word on 25 January.³

Since Tierney had previously announced a motion for a committee "into the state of Public Credit,"⁴ the government's chief concern from now on was to avoid pernicious dissensions and prevent the Whigs getting command of the question. In his endeavours to keep the peace, Lord Liverpool played the premier's role to perfection, though as usual a crucial occasion drove him into one of his "grand fidgetts."⁵ Having twice denounced "the speculations" of the Bullion Committee in the House of Lords, he was as strongly committed

1 Ibid., p.394.

2 T.F. Lewis to Lord Grenville, 25 January 1819, Grenville MSS.

3 Canning's diary, 25 January 1819, Canning MSS.

4 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxix, 65.

5 Huskisson to Mrs. Huskisson, /23 January 1819/, Add. MSS. 39949, ff. 37-40. A few days later he wrote: "Liverpool beats Binning at fidgettis. He ought to be the Grand Cross of the Order." Ibid., ff.41-2.

as any of his colleagues, but not for a moment did he stand on his dignity or declare himself inconvincible. Indeed, in January 1819 he freely admitted the justice of his adversaries' arguments where eight months before he had called them "now per force abandoned."¹ Doubtless it was he who arranged for each point of view to be fairly represented on the parliamentary committees, or in Huskisson's words, for "a large sprinkling of Opposition, and a good deal of the talent of the House, with a less proportion than usual of Country Gentlemen as make weights."² Certainly Peel, whose professions of neutrality none could asperse, was his nominee for the chairmanship of the Commons' committee,³ and likewise with his connivance Lord King found a place on the Lords', though as the landlord who had ordered his tenants to pay their rents in gold he was the most notorious bullionist of all.⁴ It is surely significant that when Canning made mention of his opponents the Prime Minister's name was never included.⁵

The opposition was kept in hand with equal aplomb. Since both Vansittart and Tierney were proposing committees, the discussion was confined to the mundane matters of terms of reference, constitution and membership. The government favoured a comprehensive but confidential inquiry, for such would get to the heart of the problem while avoiding what might otherwise

1 See Mansard, 1st ser., xxxiv. 574, 578, xxxviii. 924, 948-9, xxxix. 32.

2 Huskisson to Mrs. Huskisson, 3 February /1819/, Add. MSS. 39949, f.59.

3 Gash, pp.240-1.

4 Lord Grenville to Lord Liverpool, 27 January 1819, Lord Liverpool to Lord Grenville, 30 January 1819, Add. MSS. 38275, ff. 133-4, 167-8.

5 Canning's diary, 1-3 April 1819, Canning MSS. T.F. Lewis, a staunch bullionist, got the impression "that Lord Liverpool and Huskisson are very sincerely in earnest to do what ought to be done." T.F. Lewis to Lord Grenville, 21 January 1819, Grenville MSS.

be imprudent disclosures of the Bank's true condition. At first there was here a discernible difference with the Whigs. Vansittart's motion specifically sought an inquiry into the feasibility of resumption where Tierney's referred with peculiar vagueness "to the state of public credit as connected with the circulation of Bank paper,"¹ and Williams-Wynn was probably not alone in thinking that the generality would "introduce such a variety of topics as to divert the public attention from the one most important to which it should by every means be steadily directed."² On second thoughts, however, Tierney rewrote his notice in the order book, and then a committee "to report whether any, and what reasons exist for continuing" the restriction became scarcely distinguishable from one "to consider of the State of the Bank of England with reference to the expediency of the Resumption of Cash Payments."³ Even so, a withdrawal on the government's part was quite out of the question. Though Tierney had got in first, this was no reason for giving way, especially when a division to sort out the allegiances of new members had not yet eventuated, for to lose the initiative on the first important question would be absolute disaster. Both sides in fact were impatient for a trial of strength, the Whigs to prove their new-found solidarity, the ministers to parade their majority; and after four or five hours of skirmishing over trifles in which speaker upon speaker strained to produce disagreement they finally got what they wanted. In some respects the result was disappointing to all concerned. The opposition had been sanguine enough to expect almost 200 votes, but in the event only trooped 168 strong into the lobby against

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxix. 65, 72, 104, 131-3.

2 Charles Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 26 January 1819, Coed-y-maen MSS.

3 See Tierney's motion and Vansittart's amendment. CJ, lxxiv. 64.

the government's 277. Even so, on what was a division on straight party lines the ministers found the minority sufficiently large to be distinctly disquieting. The more the opposition perfected its association, which a line-up of nearly 170 seemingly indicated, the more the government was obliged to follow suit, and as long as independence remained an honourable political course that was a task fraught with any number of difficulties.¹

As it turned out, by the end of the session the excellence of party needed no better advertisement than what had gone before. Time and time again the caprices of the country gentlemen, and official men as well, muddled the government's plans and made a mockery of its parliamentary authority. With a new parliament and over one hundred and fifty new faces² probably the trouble was not unanticipated, for it invariably took a year or two for the members to settle down into conditioned postures and a few defied categorisation long after that. However, whether this made the ministers more sinned against than sinning, as they themselves were apt to declare, was highly doubtful. Under Castlereagh's gentle rule the attendance of official members had often left much to be desired, and even in the face of a resurgent opposition the old habits of desultoriness died hard, especially after a session which had been easy going throughout. The slackness of course was infectious. No country gentleman worth his salt would sit out a debate which front-benchers appeared to die in, and neither was he likely

1 For the debates see Hansard, 1st ser., xxxix. 213-75. It is interesting to note that the ministerial speakers received explicit instructions to avoid "the principles of the question." Huskisson to Mrs. Huskisson, 3 February 1819/, Add. MSS. 39949, ff.58-9.

2 The number of members without previous parliamentary experience totalled 157, nearly a quarter of the House. In the period 1734-1832 only the elections of 1768 and 1802 returned more. Gerrit P. Judd, Members of Parliament, 1734-1832, p.28.

to comprehend the growing pressure of committee and departmental work which to some extent lay behind the casualness. As Arbuthnot once had to be told, "they wd. not try to support those in office who wd. not take the trouble of trying to support themselves."¹ On the other hand, there may have been an element of vindictiveness in the country gentlemen's attitude, an intuitive feeling that post-war difficulties were somehow the government's fault; that there was too much misjudgement, too much last minute temporising and too great a readiness to abide parliament's wisdom. Certainly Vansittart more than anyone else became their whipping-boy, and the deviousness of his finance, his false prognostications and his parliamentary ineptitude was proverbial.² Possibly their incorrigibility went even deeper. Hitherto the ministers had seemed either unable or unwilling to escape from the old-fashioned concept of limited government which made the army and navy, diplomacy, trade and finance the sum of its concerns. More often than not, social legislation was brought in by a private member and even then it was a fair bet that the preliminary research had been done by a committee in which official influence was negligible. Brougham's committee on the education of the London poor sat three consecutive years with an overwhelming Whig majority and only one placeman. Sir Robert Peel's on child labour in "the different Manufactories" included three in an original membership of thirty-eight. Whether the government liked it or not, an attitude of disinterest or neutrality on such questions was becoming less and less honourable. Under the impact of recent distress, Christian humanitarianism, utilitarian theorising and a pragmatical search for greater efficiency the nation's social conscience was beginning to stir itself, and far too often the

1 Arbuthnot, p.15.

2 Ibid., pp.16-17.

enthusiasm of the individual reformer was thwarted by legal intricacies, inadequate information and the innate conservatism of the House of Lords. In short, it seems likely that as far as the country gentlemen were concerned, the government might get in step with public opinion or take the consequences.

The first signs of recalcitrance were not slow in coming. Because in the past Brougham had been found too domineering to be a good committee man, the government made a firm resolve to exclude him from the Bank inquiry despite his well-known predilection for economic subjects and their own eager concern to appear openminded. Shortly after the committee was balloted, however, a motion for his election was beaten by only 42 votes, prominent independents like Wodehouse of Norfolk and Davenport of Cheshire joining the Whigs while many others pointedly abstained.¹ The next day the rebelliousness was carried into the committee sitting above stairs on the Windsor establishment. Though the ministers confidently expected "to carry thro' every part of the arrangement,"² two out of six equerries were discarded, a second defeat on the same question was only narrowly averted and the salaries of the officers of the late Queen's household, customarily continued to them in lieu of pensions, had to be immediately given up.³ Even the reduced establishment was mildly reprobated by the country gentlemen when it came before the House, for twenty or so, including four county members, sided with the opposition on a motion to charge the Privy Purse with the Duke of York's allowance as custos. As Williams-Wynn told Lord Buckingham: "the striking feature - to use a Castlereaghism - of the day, is the unwillingness of most of the new members to be considered

1 Buckingham, Regency, i. 328.

2 Huskisson to Canning, 15 February 1819/, Canning MSS.

3 Colchester, iii. 69-70; Buckingham, Regency, ii. 302.

as belonging to Government, to receive notes or answer whip."¹

Perhaps on questions of economy the hostility could be shrugged off as a more or less traditional grudge which every unattached member bore the king's ministers. Not so a question of social reform, and at the beginning of March Mackintosh confounded the government by carrying a committee to consider "so much of the Criminal Laws as relates to Capital Punishment in Felonies." Romilly, until his tragic suicide in November 1818, had kept this subject constantly before parliament with a series of bills abolishing the death penalty wherever it seemed grossly disproportionate to the crime. More often than not, his efforts came to naught in the House of Lords, but the problem had been publicised and the growing compassion of the country at large promised to do the rest. Inevitably, the debate for and against humaneness drew attention to the nature and efficacy of secondary punishments, particularly transportation and imprisonment. From 1811-18 no less than six select committees investigated this subject on the Commons' behalf, systematically exploring the evils of overcrowded prisons, overcrowded hulks and struggling convict settlements. But by 1819 without doubt the incentive for further inquiry was the rising crime rate. An act of 1815 had ordered annual returns of the prison population in each town and county to be laid before parliament, and these statistics told a dismal tale of increasing committals and convictions, though by far the most disturbing fact which emerged was the steadily declining percentage of actual executions. Such a striking indication of the disinclination of judges and juries to enforce the law was alarming to conservative and reformer alike, to the one for its dangerous leniency, to the other for its attestation of the gap between letter and practice. Indeed, in 1818 the Home Office supplied figures to show that in ten

1 Ibid., p.315.

years the number convicted on capital charges had risen four fold and the number executed only twofold.¹ All this without any real change in either the law or the machinery for its enforcement.

The social and legal implications of the problem were obviously immense. If it was true that leniency was a major cause of the current lawlessness and that public commiseration for the criminal was precluding a return to wholesome severity, the country had landed itself in a vicious circle of criminality from which it would be very difficult to escape. But however unpleasant the facts were, the ministers at least faced up to them, though in so doing they have never been given the credit they undoubtedly deserve. As early as 1818 the government was contemplating what measures to take. When Lord Lansdowne just prior to the dissolution in June requested information on the state of the gaols, Sidmouth "cordially concurred," agreed that "a subject of greater importance" did not exist and disclosed that "it had been his intention, in the interval between the close and meeting of parliament, to make inquiries to the same effect."² Possibly this seemed nothing more than politician's talk. If so, the sceptics were soon silenced. About Christmas Harrowby was describing "the prisons" as one of "many difficult questions before us." "Upon several of these points," he went on to argue, "even if it should be decided that Government will do nothing or at least do nothing early, it seems very important that we should so far understand one another, as to know what line is to be held in conversation with friends. It is hardly creditable to continue longer without an opinion at least, if

1 In 1807 343 were capitally convicted and 63 executed. In 1817 the corresponding figures were 1302 and 115. PP. 1818, xvi. 190.

2 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxviii. 1186-92.

not a measure, upon some of them."¹ There is no reason to suppose his advice went unheeded. Though no record of a Cabinet discussion appears to exist, it is fair to assume that the subject came under consideration at two meetings at the Lord Chancellor's in January 1819.² Certainly Canning - in Castlereagh's absence - and Sidmouth both announced inquiries into "the state and discipline of the various prisons" soon after the session's commencement.³

The government's aim was to capture the initiative from the Whigs and the reformers on what had now become a question of great public moment, and its failure underlined the dangerous reputation for unprogressiveness it had already earned. Not that the opprobrium was really deserved. The difference between the ministers and men of Mackintosh's stamp centred less on the desirability of change than on its practicableness. Canning and Castlereagh were the first to admit that some gaols were universities of crime, transportation something of a farce and capital punishment a deplorable necessity. Their argument was that crime had to be deterred by sufficiently severe penalties, always remembering "that the fear of death was the strongest moral sanction that could be applied to the human mind." If and when "a scheme of secondary punishments should be found effectual for the prevention of a particular crime, it ought to be adopted, and the capital punishment for that crime, unless one which the laws of God made punishable by death, should be abolished." As they saw it, Mackintosh and his kind were blinded by their humanity. What was the point in reducing the number of capital felonies when

1 Bathurst, p.466.

2 Canning's diary, 12-13 January 1819, Canning MSS. Cabinet meetings on foreign policy were usually held at Castlereagh's or the Foreign Office.

3 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxix. 71, 79-80.

transportation was regarded almost as state-assisted emigration and imprisonment as a refuge from work, winter and the world generally? Too great a leniency would fill the gaols and convict ships to overflowing and hamper the very improvements the reformers were clamouring for. "It was not wise in any state," Castlereagh concluded, "and least of all in this state, at the present moment, to arraign its own administration of justice, in the eyes of its own people and of the world, without at least presenting, at the same time, a remedial resource."¹

Caution, then, seemed common sense. What the government mistook was the pitch of public emotion on the issue of capital punishment and the suspicion which attaches to any conservative when he attempts reform. The precise wording of the government's motion was for an inquiry "into the state and description of Gaols, or other places of confinement, and into the best method of providing for the reformation, as well as the safe custody and punishment of Offenders." One critic, and his view was typical, called it "a hodge-podge committee on Penal Laws, Prisons, Botany Bay and Forgery" which would drag on indefinitely, submit the occasional report and never reach a single significant conclusion.² Castlereagh himself appeared to admit the immensity of the subject by suggesting "one committee divided, if they would, into sections," a novel procedure which the Speaker promptly ruled out of order.³ A warning of parliament's disillusionment came on 18 February when Henry Grey Bennet submitted a motion on transportation and the penal settlements. Though a committee was avoided, a display of honest indignation by the ministers to the effect that the mover was poaching on their preserve did not prevent several

1 See the debates in *ibid.*, 464-509, 645-52, 740-59, 777-845.

2 Buckingham, *Regency*, II. 323-4.

3 *Hansard*, 1st ser., xcix. 752, 776-7.

startling defections from their side of the House.¹ The ultimate test, however, was Mackintosh's proposal for a committee on capital felonies a fortnight later. The government carried its "hodge-podge committee" the day before with little bother, but once again, this time decisively, the country gentlemen refused to be convinced that a narrower inquiry would do more harm than good. Nearly thirty independents contributed to the opposition vote of 147, an ample muster so it turned out for a majority of 19.

The defeat had almost catastrophic repercussions. Coming hard on the heels of a series of sorry performances, a fresh reverse resulted in a complete breakdown of parliamentary discipline. Night after night the government whips came to the House to find the opposition benches packed to the gangways, and night after night they tried in vain to stop the early departure of friends and colleagues from their own. In these circumstances Castlereagh's absence was particularly unfortunate. His sister, Lady Ellenborough, died just three days after Mackintosh's triumph, and though the most important business was put off a week while he attended the funeral, during such a trying period his personal authority was sorely missed indeed. Twice Arbuthnot wrote to the Prime Minister telling him that the official members were not attending and the country gentlemen playing coy as a result, and eventually in desperation Long and Huskisson accompanied him to Fife House where as usual they heard a long monologue about what politics were like in the good old days. Liverpool, however, knew Castlereagh better than they did. Even to assume his authority as Leader of the House for a moment would arouse his suspicions, so envious and ungenerous was the nature which lay behind his calm exterior, and the most that could be done was to summon a meeting of office-

1 Buckingham, Regency, ii. 314-15.

holders in both his and the Prime Minister's name.¹ The carpeting almost certainly took place before 18 March, to which date a renewed motion of Ridley's for the reduction of the Admiralty Board had been postponed. Nevertheless, it had little visible effect. While "office man" no doubt were called smartly back into line for the occasion, the waywardness of the country gentlemen continued to sap the government's strength. Despite every effort on the part of the whips - "since the Walcheren question I never exerted myself so much," Arbuthnot wrote² - the ministerial majority barely exceeded eighty and at least twenty independents voted with the opposition.

The decisive blow, curiously enough, occurred on a Scottish question. A system of local government appertained there, endorsed and guaranteed by the Act of Union, whereby the burgh councils were virtually self-electing. Only in the event of an invalid election or no election could the Crown restore the franchise to the burgesses at large. Following a law suit over the parliamentary return of 1774 and subsequent disfranchisement, Stirling's constitution had been permanently "democratised" in 1781, and it was largely on this precedent - the Court of Session having upheld the illegality of the council's election - that Montrose was granted the same privilege in 1817. Once granted the concession proved a first-rate political blunder; for no sooner was it known than strenuous attempts were made to find similar technicalities to overthrow other councils or failing that to draw up petitions complaining of the manifold iniquities of oligarchic exclusiveness. At this stage the government saw fit to intervene. Much of the trouble lay in financial mismanagement, Aberdeen's bankruptcy being particularly notorious, and in 1818 Macconochie, the Lord Advocate,

1 Arbuthnot, pp.15-16.

2 Ibid., p.18.

brought in a bill to control this misapplication and in some cases malversation of public money. Though a fresh shower of petitions forced its withdrawal after only one reading, on no account whatever would the ministers go further. If once the magistracy was opened to popular influence, they said, the whole state of the representation might be called into question, for in Scotland the burgh members were elected indirectly by the councils themselves; and inasmuch as the government had over three-quarters of the Scottish seats firm in its grasp they certainly did not intend to sell that ascendancy on the cheap. In the last resort, though, the problem became one of parliamentary management. Confronted by a spirited and well-organised opposition, the ministers could not afford to take any minor question lightly, but as always it remained notoriously difficult to collect a good House on a subject of predominantly Scottish interest. The petitions which had come in from nearly all the burghs insisted that a return to popular elections was the only worthwhile reform, and when soon after the Easter recess Lord Archibald Hamilton, the Whig member for Lanarkshire, moved to refer them to a select committee it became essential for the government to resist. There had already been an unhappy augury in April 1819, a request for information relating to the Aberdeen fiasco being turned down by a mere five votes, and this time so poor was the attendance on the ministerial side that even with negligible assistance from the country gentlemen the opposition carried their proposal 149 votes to 144. The next day Canning was round at Fife House arguing "the necessity of a vital question."¹

Appropriately, for it was on taxation and expenditure that the government had been most hard-pressed, the ministers chose to stake its existence on a financial issue. Vansittart's

1 Canning's diary, 7 May 1819, Canning MSS.

and Liverpool's advisers had long felt uncomfortable about the pusillanimity of official policy in this connection, though in a sense the temporising which was their chief complaint sprang from the conflicting advice they themselves offered. At the beginning of the session Huskisson made a scathing attack on the shifts and expedients adopted since the peace, describing "selling exchequer bills daily to redeem funded debt daily, then funding those exchequer bills once a year, or once in two years, in order to go over the same ground again" as a mystery which deceived no one.¹ Vansittart's henchmen, Mill, the principal clerk assistant at the Treasury, and Herries, were equally disillusioned.² Indeed, only the Chancellor remained unperturbed, for the Prime Minister himself admitted that "a Debt of between 7 & 8 hundred millions without any Sinking Fund, or at best with a Sinking Fund of a million constitutes a State of things too appalling to be presented to a new Parliament & too critical with a view to the permanent Welfare of the Country to be permitted to continue without an Endeavour to improve it."³ In a way it was the reports of the Bank committees which clinched the argument in favour of thoroughgoing reappraisal. These were in the government's hands by the middle of April and the repayment to the Bank of "a large amount at an early period" was strongly recommended in each. Since the deficit of ways and means was already estimated at £14,000,000, to pay off £6,000,000 of exchequer bills which Vansittart stood pledged to and £10,000,000 of the Bank debt roughly £30,000,000 would have

1 Liverpool, 11. 382-4.

2 Arbuthnot, p.17.

3 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 6 August 1818, Add. MSS. 38273, f.16. Arbuthnot described Vansittart as "proceeding with all the unwary simplicity of honesty & truth ... and should the storm of general dissatisfaction burst upon him, it will find him totally unprepared." Arbuthnot, p.17.

to be borrowed to bring the budget into balance.¹ In peace no government dared go a-begging to parliament for this amount.

The alternatives were to reimpose the war taxes or appropriate the entire sinking fund for the service of the year, the unpopularity of the one being fully met by the ignominy of the other. The first expedient, the reintroduction of the property tax, was never seriously considered. Only Herries was bold enough to suggest it and he was soon shouted down by those who had richer memories of the furore of 1816.² Besides, the administrative machinery which had sustained the tax had been largely broken up and there were definite advantages in keeping it "a war resource" only. In comparison the depredation of the sinking fund was far more attainable. While there must have been a sentimental attachment to this pillar of Pittite finance and after so many years considerable reluctance to admit its fallacy, even among the government a feeling of disillusionment was at least weakening the time-honoured principle of its inviolability. In three years of peace the nominal capital of the funded debt had been reduced £24,000,000 while the unfunded increased £4,000,000,³ a performance which made a mockery of the arithmetical magic by which it was supposed to eliminate the whole debt within forty years. Early in 1816 Castlereagh spoke shamelessly of ministers helping themselves to its treasure once the public credit fully recovered and by 1818 Huskisson scarcely deigned to hide his impatience to begin.⁴ Inevitably,

1 Undated memorandum, Castlereagh MSS, xxxv. 1024-5.

2 Memoranda book, 23 April 1819, Herries MSS. Herries who was Auditor of the Civil List was not a member of parliament until 1823.

3 PP. 1868-9, xxxv. 788-91. Contemporaries could not be certain of the figures because the consolidation of the British and Irish debts after 5 January 1817 made a precise calculation exceptionally difficult.

4 Hansard, 1st ser., xxxii. 1108, xxxviii. 232-3.

attention was being drawn to the thesis first expounded by Hamilton the Scottish economist that the only real sinking fund was a surplus of income over expenditure. In a memorandum of February 1819 Huskisson put the idea in a nutshell:

Whatever surplus of revenue we possess must be our real sinking fund. The growth of the revenue, and the interest of the debt really diminished, will improve that sinking fund year after year whilst peace continues. Should it require further improvement, I am sure that we should find in Parliament and the country a better disposition to submit to any moderate sacrifice for that purpose than we can possibly expect so long as the present system is persevered in. Our sinking fund (it is the only fund deserving of such a name) would then be whatever surplus of revenue the country can afford without too much pressure; and, be its amount great or small, it will do more for the real reduction of debt, for the real stability of public credit, for the character of England abroad, and the strength and ease of Government at home, than ever can be hoped for by continuing in a system which has all the inconveniences without any of the advantages of concealment, and is liable to all the derangement and expense incidental to complicated machinery, without producing any beneficial result, even whilst its movements meet with no interruption.¹

The advice here preferred was accepted with little or no reservation. In 1819 the only conceivable way to obtain a surplus was by bringing the entire sinking fund of £15,500,000 to the service of the year, for the supply of £20,500,000 was almost three times as much as the revenue itself could contribute. The question then followed whether or not the country could afford any beyond this. Though Lord Liverpool eight months before had emphatically reaffirmed the policy of fiscal relief,² the Cabinet now screwed up sufficient courage to demand £3,000,000 in new taxes, about half of it to come from a lighter variation of the old war excise on malt. This, it was calculated, would produce a surplus of £5,000,000 over the next

1 Liverpool, 11. 384.

2 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 6 August 1818, Add. MSS. 38273, f.16.

two years, and while almost £50,000,000 would have to be borrowed to achieve it the ministers looked forward confidently to the rapid accumulation of stock in the hands of the debt commissioners, to a rise in the funds which would facilitate a conversion operation later on and to the "natural tendency" of the revenue to augment itself which by producing larger and larger surpluses would accelerate the whole process.¹ Seen in this light the new policy was not a defiance of the theory of the sinking fund, but simply an admission that hitherto it had proved unworkable in practice.

The actual decision to change course was taken a fortnight before the parliamentary crisis came to a head at the beginning of May.² At that time Herries alone strenuously opposed the plan, preferring to go on the market for the whole of the loan and not at all happy with the incidence of the new taxes.³ However, when the question of a vote of confidence arose, the ministers normally unconcerned with economic matters began to echo his doubts about its feasibility. Bloomfield who flew to Town immediately a despairing letter from Castlereagh arrived at Brighton made a point of seeing Sidmouth and Eldon before even the Prime Minister, and while both blamed the trouble on "the heretofore example of supineness in the official attendance which disquieted the independent members," it is more than likely that one or other of them conveyed apprehensions of a further defeat on the budget resolutions.⁴ The Lord Chancellor certainly felt the government was inviting its downfall and told Liverpool so in a letter he sent him the day after the

1 In 1820 and 1821 the government predicted surpluses of £5,800,000 and £6,037,000. Undated memorandum, Castlereagh MSS, xiv. 1026.

2 Canning's diary, 24 April 1819, Canning MSS. Canning later asserted the same in the House. Harvard, 1st ser., xl. 971.

3 Memoranda book, 27 April 1819, Herries MSS.

4 George IV., ii. 288-9.

Cabinet decided to stand or fall by parliament's decision.¹ That the Prince Regent, "though unwilling to give a decided opinion at this distance," sounded a similar caution suggests that Bloomfield picked up pessimist talk somewhere in Town, and if not at Eldon's where else?² Nevertheless, Liverpool, and presumably Canning and Castlereagh also, was in no two minds about the desirability of a showdown. The dismal run of defeats or near defeats was making the government appear a government by sufferance not choice, weakening its ability to carry on the King's business and therefore not without dishonour to the ministers themselves. As the Prime Minister answered Eldon's expostulations:

After the defeats we have already experienced during this Session, our remaining in office is a positive evil. It confounds all ideas of government in the minds of men. It disgraces us personally, and renders us less capable every day of being of any real service to the country, either now or hereafter. If therefore things are to remain as they are, I am quite clear that there is no advantage, in any way, in our being the persons to carry on the public service. A strong and decisive effort can alone redeem our character and credit, and is as necessary for the country as it is for ourselves.³

Nor was defeat anticipated on a vote of confidence despite the Lord Chancellor's gloomy predictions. Lord Liverpool remained firmly convinced that "the evil temper and disposition" of the independent members stemmed from no deep-rooted antipathy, and though further taxes on malt and spirits were bound to upset the country gentlemen, inasmuch as they did just this they would constitute a real test of their true loyalties. Put thus the exercise seemed perfectly straightforward. All that had to be done was to afford them "the opportunity of manifesting by their conduct, the nature and degree of support which they are pre-

1 Canning's diary, 10 May 1819, Canning MSS.

2 George IV, 11. 290-2.

3 Eldon, 11. 329.

pared to give," and the ministers had every chance "of recovering that weight and influence which ought to belong to every Govt., & which can alone enable it to carry on the public service."¹

As it happened, by a not altogether wise manoeuvre, Tierney himself silenced the defeatists. On the same day as but interestingly enough before the debate on Scottish burgh reform he suddenly announced a motion on the state of the nation.² Such a proposal, in spite of its inferences of incompetence and mismanagement if carried, did not necessarily at once decide the government's fate, as the most recent precedent, that of 1778, made only too clear. On the other hand, there was nothing to stop either side making it a question of confidence if they so desired, and when Tierney at one point in his address frankly admitted "that the motion he was about to submit did go to produce a change of administration" the ministers had no choice but to stake the government's existence on the result. Though the Whigs ranged far and wide in their search for brickbats, from the poor laws to European politics, the division at the end of the four hour marathon was an unqualified triumph for their adversaries. A two to one majority in a record House amply justified Lord Liverpool's earlier sanguineness. If Tierney had been "determined to have a grand field day, and to parade his troops," as Castlereagh tauntingly suggested, the brave sight had stirred none to join his colours. Some remarks of Buckingham, who was for ever trying to win his cousin from opposition ways, were here worthy of repetition: "the Country Gentlemen," he had written the previous February, "delight in seeing the ministers dragged through the dirt at the tail of said Country Gentlemen's waggon or Carts. But

1 George IV, ii. 290.

2 Courier, 7 May 1819.

depend upon it, were any question to be brought forward the result of which would go to decide upon the fate of the Govt. you would see those very Country Gentlemen flock to the standard of Ministers to save them & themselves from the opposition of which they entertain as cordial a dislike as I do."¹ Time proved him absolutely right.

Predictably, a thoroughly chastened opposition caused little bother for the remainder of the session. The military and naval estimates which had been subjected to the usual scrutiny of a select committee were rushed through in a matter of days and in the renewed discussion on the resumption of cash payments the only serious dissentients were a Bank director who happened to be an unrepentant anti-bullionist and a Norwich banker whose currency views were unorthodox to the point of being outlandish. Moreover, the resolutions stating the government's financial requirements, avowedly a second vote of confidence, were carried by a majority little short of 200. Sidmouth truly remarked that "the close of our parliamentary campaign is far more satisfactory than its commencement."² Yet if it did seem looking back that the government invariably muddled through in the end, a nagging awareness of personal estrangement within the Cabinet left little room for complacency. Broadly speaking, the cause of the resentment was Canning's rising influence. In many respects, latterly over his return to office from a Portuguese exile, Lord Liverpool's partiality for him had become patently obvious. On that occasion, though the concerted dislike of Sidmouth and others was only too evident in their refusal to assist an arrangement by shuffling places, the Prime Minister faithfully remembered the "understanding and expectation" he had

1 Lord Buckingham to Charles Williams-Wynn, 10 February 1819, Coed-y-maen MSS.

2 Sidmouth, iii. 246.

given Canning shortly before he left England in 1814, an offer of first refusal on any vacancy that might happen to arise in his absence.¹ Canning himself was eternally conscious of his colleagues' dislike and distrust, and he also knew that in 1812 he had been cast into the political wilderness by taking much too high and mighty a view of his own importance. In his first years at the India Board therefore, the office which was finally allowed him, he was excessively careful to appear a model of propriety and let bygones, like his celebrated quarrel with Castlereagh and his stupid obduracy of 1812, be bygones. To a great extent the circumstances the government found itself in at the beginning of 1819 were the freak of fortune which forced him back into the limelight and led to renewed fears that once again as a rogue elephant he would terrorise the political jungle. He alone of his fellow ministers had taken a liberal stand on the reform of the criminal law, making a speech of some renown in support of Romilly's Privately Stealing Bill in 1810. Huskisson it was, his closest political crony, who saw an actual surplus as the only efficacious sinking fund and financial policy. Above all, both had long been confirmed bullionists, and in recommending the repayment of a large portion of the Bank advances and the convertibility of notes into bullion beginning at 8ls. per ounce with progressive reductions to mint price, the secret committees on resumption fully

1 For details of Canning's admission to office see Canning to Huskisson, 25 January 1816, Huskisson to Lord Liverpool, 5 February 1816, Add. MSS. 38740, ff.278-80, 38741, ff.4-5; Lord Sidmouth to Lord Melville, 8 February 1816, Sidmouth MSS; Huskisson to Canning, 6, 14 February 1816, Lord Liverpool to Canning, 13 February 1816, Canning to Lord Liverpool, 8 March 1816, Canning MSS. It is not generally known that in 1813 Lord Liverpool endeavoured to open the Admiralty for Canning, another instance of his cordiality and friendship.

vindicated their economic professions.

Nay it was then to attribute each and every volte-face to the insidious influence Canning exercised at Fife House. In a way Vansittart appeared the chief victim of the restored favourite, for the country blamed him more than any other minister for the financial shambles of the post-war period and no one could forget his famous resolution of 1811 that "Promissory Notes ... are ... equivalent to the legal Coin of the Realm" which the findings of the Bank committees now positively refuted. On the other hand, and no doubt his proud and sensitive nature exaggerated the danger, Castlereagh could not help feeling his own position was none too secure. On economic subjects of which the House these days had more than its fill he frankly confessed to being all at sea,¹ Canning's superb oratory inevitably stole much of the glory from him on the floor, and as leader of the Commons the parliamentary unruliness of the government rank and file seemed partly his responsibility. Moreover, Peel too had become a force to be reckoned with. In his six years as Irish Secretary a considerable number of Irish members had attached themselves to his train, and his assumption by tacit agreement to the leadership of the Protestant cause to-

1 Lord Castlereagh to Lord Clancairty, 12 April 1816, Castlereagh MSS., xxx. 951-9. In Hansard, 1st ser., xxiv. 165 there is an interesting example of how the opposition, in this case Horner, took him to task for his ignorance: "The noble lord had thrown out such a mass of language and ideas, and had made such a novel combination of twisted expressions, that it was difficult in the many theories he had urged, to understand that one which applied to the resumption of cash payments, or to the manner in which they might be most speedily effected. /Hear, hear! It was possible that the noble lord held the thread which would guide him through the labyrinth of theory and phraseology into which he had gone; but as that thread was not visible to him, he would not venture to plunge into the inextricable abyss. /Hear, hear!"

gether with his maturing talents as a parliamentarian brought others as well. No longer was he a mere departmental spokesman but an able contributor to debates in general. On one occasion even Canning was pleased to see him taken down a peg or two when Brougham turned on him smartly for attacking his inquiry into endowed schools and colleges.¹ Sensing these ambitions and frustrations the pundits sent conjectures flying thick and fast. Some spoke of a new administration along Protestant lines, others simply of Vansittart's dismissal and Peel's promotion in his stead.² One thing was certain though. As soon as people began talking thus, the argument in favour of a Cabinet reshuffle gained a conspicuous reinforcement.

1 Canning's diary, 23 June 1819, Canning MSS.

2 Arbuthnot, pp.16-17; Buckingham, Regency, ii.303, 324-5.

AGAIN THE REVOLUTIONISTS

Parliament broke up for the summer holidays on 13 July, quite the longest and most arduous session since the end of the war. Much to the ministers' annoyance no doubt, the Prince Regent chose this very moment to raise yet again the highly delicate question of divorce, and the whole Cabinet had to linger in Town for another fortnight before making good their escape into the country. In all likelihood only six remained in or around London when news arrived that Orator Hunt's reform meeting at Manchester had been dispersed by the military with an alarming number of civilian casualties.¹ The fact alone is an apt comment on the continuing aristocratic context of politics. For weeks reports had been flooding in to the Home Office that the Radicals were once again preparing for a day of reckoning, and a succession of "tumultuous assemblies" throughout the Midlands and North, the reappearance of political societies seeking national affiliations and the usual rumours of secret arsenals and midnight drilling on the moors seemed to corroborate all they said. Sidmouth, who was in the best position to know, definitely thought the situation as serious as in December 1816. On that occasion he had wanted the law strengthened, and the day before Peterloo he was writing in much the same vein to a Devonshire friend.² Yet his colleagues refused to deny themselves accustomed pleasures. Though there was no reason not to disbelieve the warning of the Lancashire magistrates "that some alarming insurrection is in

1 Eldon, ii. 336, 338. On 12 August Liverpool, Castlereagh, Vansittart, Wellesley-Pole and Canning attended a meeting of the Cabinet. Canning's diary, 12 August 1819, Canning MSS. Canning sailed for the Continent two days later.

2 Sidmouth, iii. 249.

contemplation,"¹ they blithely went their separate ways, some like Canning to the Continent and others to hearth and home in the four corners of the kingdom.

Ironically, the incident at Manchester, which brought them and eventually parliament itself hastening back, was the climax of the gathering storm. Before Peterloo economic disillusionment, a daring press and exuberant campaigning had recaptured the interest of the lower orders in parliamentary reform, and the magistrates, uncertain of the law regarding public assemblies, afraid to use the military before violence was actually done to life, limb or property, found themselves powerless in the face of the orderly demonstrations which "the reforming crew" were only too capable of organising. But after the "massacre" the tables were turned. Assisted by "loyalist" associations and the like, the authorities were emboldened to do their duty; and not least because their best men were snatched from them at a moment of greatest need, the Radical challenge proved effete and short-lived. The first reaction of the hot-heads was to meet violence with violence. In and around Manchester there were a number of ugly scenes when street crowds swore vengeance on the perpetrators and joined battle with the military. Sticks, stones and imprecations, however, only persuaded the civil power to redouble its efforts, for if this was the mood of the people, the stories of pikes smelted and pistols smuggled seemed very near to the truth. The response once tempers had simmered down was a return to constitutionalist forms of protest; to subscription funds for the victims, legal actions against the yeomanry and public meetings all over the country. Even this sort of campaign, whatever names and numbers it managed to attract, had an essential weakness. Its whole

1 Papers relative to the Internal State of the Country, no.1, pp. 1819-20, iv. 219.

accent was on inquiry, parliamentary inquiry, which meant that the chances of success depended in the last resort wholly on the Whigs. In coming forward when they did, Fitzwilliam and others shoved the popular leaders ignominiously into the background and unwittingly destroyed the class solidarity which was the reform movement's main impetus. After Peterloo it was not the system but the ministers who were denounced, and they could not be brought to book until parliament met. Immediately the initiative was taken from ~~the~~ ^{the} people, the drift back to apathy commenced, as Thistlewood who in November and December attempted the old trick of simultaneous meetings soon found out for himself. And throughout 1820 a steadily improving economic situation completed the return to normality.

Radical dissensions, a run of successful prosecutions, the stout exertions of "the well-disposed" only gradually dissipated the government's alarm. Ill-informed and misinformed as Sidmouth was, it took a long while before things were seen in proper proportion. Towards the end of October even, he was telling Eldon: "the clouds in the North are very black, and I think they must burst."¹ Still, this did not stop the ministers freely admitting that the ramifications of Radical plotting did not extend much beyond Lancashire and Glasgow. At the beginning of September Lord Liverpool made a short tour of the South and came back convinced that "the agricultural counties are in a state of progressive prosperity." Indeed, outside the disturbed districts, where "nothing can be worse or more alarming," he thought the country's condition had never been better since the end of the war, perhaps since his entry into public life almost thirty years before. Certainly, assuming disorder to be the invariable outcome of distress, the available statistics painted a rosy picture: poor rates were down, the excise

1 Eldon, ii. 348.

up, criminal convictions less and corn prices in general decline.¹ Unlike 1816-17, then, the trouble seemed very much localised, the metropolis showed more inclination to follow rather than lead and the economy was already taking a favourable turn.

What disturbed the government in 1819 was not an evident threat of insurrection - nothing like the Spa Fields conspiracy was ever discovered - but the apparently irresistible progress of disaffection. While Lord Liverpool understood Great Britain's growing dependence on "foreign demand" and how much easier it was to organise protest in the new industrial towns, he shared with his colleagues an ineradicable conviction that "if the events of the French Revolution had not directed the attention of the lower orders of the community, and those immediately above them, to political considerations" the grisly prospect of class war would never have arisen.² No government could expect the people to bear privations with stoic indifference but at least in the good old days the protest had been essentially local and largely unpremeditated. The problem now was vastly different. By playing on "the worst passions of the lowest orders," by deliberately exploiting every tittle of discontent, "the promoters of general confusion" were systematically destroying "all respect for established authority and ancient institutions." Under the aegis of a free press Church and State were being openly damned and defamed. Under the banner of parliamentary reform local dissatisfactions were being lumped together and paraded as a national sentiment. Most alarming of all, under the immemorial privilege of petitioning and public assembly the common people were fast discovering the confidence which comes of discipline and large numbers. To the

1 Wellington Desp. (new series), i. 76; Liverpool, ii. 408-9.

2 Ibid., p.431.

magistrates and "loyalists" generally the very orderliness of the proceedings was more frightening than liberty caps and other "seditious" accoutrements. The drilling beforehand, the exhortations against premature violence, the march past in contingents all seemed conclusive evidence that Hunt, Wooler and company were actively preparing for class war. One of the Grenvilles was quite sure in his own mind of the imminent danger:

I utterly deny that any large body of men are authorised by the Law or can be safely suffered by the government to meet in the alarming & menacing manner in which the Manchester meeting took place, for the purpose of operating by force & terror a change in the laws & constitution of the country; if it once be permitted that under the pretence of discussing Parliamentary Reform, large bodies of men may learn the military exercise, may march with seditious banners, & with all the emblems & tunes of the French revolution, & may take undisturbed possession of the city of Manchester, menacing thereby the peace & property of all its respectable inhabitants, - & that all this must be suffered without resistance on the part of the Government, because this rebel army proclaims that it meets to consider of Parliamentary Reform, if such a pretence be once admitted & recognized, there is an end of all existing law & government, & the population of this country must be set loose to frame a new order of society through the same bloody practises which have attended the French Revolution.¹

Everyone else in his position, including the government, was thinking or beginning to think exactly the same. Despite his liberal inclinations, even Canning advised new laws for a new age: "what is wanted," he told the Prime Minister, "is not a sudden & temporary measure ... applicable to a pressing but passing emergency: but a well-considered addition to the means which the present laws afford, for repressing Evils not in their contemplation, evils of modern growth, but too apparently of deep root & thriving malignity."² With the army's reduction,

1 Thomas Grenville to Charles Williams-Wynn, 1 October 1819, Coed-y-maen MSS.

2 Canning to Lord Liverpool, 14 October 1819, Canning MSS.

with war no longer a major distraction, disaffection had truly become a permanent problem to be tackled as never before with permanent powers. In 1817 two of the four acts then passed had had a temporary validity. In 1819, if the government had got its way, only one among six would have.

In the Cabinet the necessity of strong measures went without saying. Sidmouth, who of course had first hand information of the law's inadequacies, was continually representing the invidious position the magistrates occupied; Canning was all eagerness to find "an effectual & permanent remedy;" and Eldon spent his holidays thumbing through his books and ruminating over possible improvements. The great question which the ministers had to settle among themselves was whether or not parliament should be called into special session. Sidmouth wanted no delay. As soon as the officers ironed out the legal complications, the new legislation should be hurried straight into the statute book, a salutary vigour which would show the government meant business and encourage the magistrates to even greater exertions. Lord Liverpool was more inclined to wait on events. Until the sentiments of the country gentlemen were known, he thought, and known to be in favour of wholesale measures, there was always a risk that few would turn up leaving the opposition cock of the roost. Moreover, as Canning pointed out, even if they came in good earnest, if the government had nothing substantive to propose, either new legislation or an increase in the army, the Whigs were bound to while away the time with searching and perhaps awkward questions on the Manchester incident.¹ In short, what was wanted for a meeting before Christmas was "some New Explosion" which would justify the inconvenience and the Lancashire magistrates as well.

At first the arguments in favour of delay preponder-

1 Ibid.

ated. Liverpool, Wellington, Castlereagh and Sidmouth, who were the only ministers close at hand, met at the Home Office to discuss the situation on 15 September, but probably because the latter had just heard from the Grand Jury of Lancashire that the magistrates were "unable to preserve the public peace under any circumstances of peculiar agitation,"¹ a decision was taken to summon a full Cabinet for the following week.² This second meeting, which as Sidmouth expected produced "much difference of opinion,"³ put off a proclamation in the meantime, though the ministers went away fully realising that much depended on developments in the next three weeks as protest meetings got under way.⁴ Needless to say, such chariness highly exasperated Sidmouth. "I wish those Members of the Government, who entertain that Opinion," he told one of the absentees, "were to pass Seven Hours every day for one Week at this Office & read all the Correspondence & hear all the communications which are received from various parts of the Kingdom."⁵ Perhaps it was only to be expected that the constant flow of alarmist reports nurtured his pessimism, until by the end of the month, shackled to a desk while his colleagues sported in the country, he reached the end of his tether. The letter he penned to Lord Liverpool was unusually frank, though no more so than he intended:

... hitherto my Colleagues have remained unconvinced of the imperious and urgent necessity of advising the adoption of the only Measure, which would, of itself, animate the Loyal and awe the Disaffected, and by which alone effectual Means can be provided to meet and overcome a Danger, greater, as

- 1 Papers relative to the Internal State of the Country, no.43, PP, 1819-20, iv. 246.
- 2 Lord Sidmouth to Charles Bragge-Bathurst, 14, 15 September 1819, Sidmouth MSS.
- 3 Lord Sidmouth to Lord Eldon, 18 September 1819, *ibid.*
- 4 Liverpool, ii. 410-11; Lord Liverpool to Lord Melville, 24 September 1819, Add. MSS. 38279, ff.365-6.
- 5 Lord Sidmouth to Lord Melville, 29 September 1819, Sidmouth MSS. See also Lord Sidmouth to Lord Eldon, 26 September 1819, *ibid.*

I am firmly and deliberately convinced, than any to which the Country has been exposed since the Accession of the present Royal Family to the Throne.

I write to you on this subject, as I have repeatedly spoken, in the fulness of my Heart - Health and Comfort I have willingly sacrificed to a Sense of private Honour and Publick Duty; and there is no further Sacrifice, be it what it might, that I am not ready and determined to make, if required by such Considerations. - But I feel, and have felt for some time past, that whilst the Country is suffering, from the want, as I conceive, of those decisive and efficient Measures, which the Crisis calls for, my Reputation is suffering also

I have, however, said more than I intended, tho' less, far less, than I feel. - It is a satisfaction to me to reflect that, in the various official Relations in which we have stood to each other, I have invariably proved myself

Sincerely yours,
Sidmouth.¹

Here was the merest hint of resignation. As he confided to Eldon, "on the subject of assembling Parliament, I have felt it incumbent upon me to express my Sentiments in a manner which I wish I could have thought myself justified in avoiding."² The Prime Minister, however, was less moved by Sidmouth's fervency than the altered circumstances of the case; for three days earlier he had noticed reports in the London papers that Fitzwilliam and other prominent Whigs had sent a requisition for a county meeting to the sheriff of Yorkshire. Up to this time "the respectable part of Opposition" had shown a marked reluctance to champion the people. In private almost all of them agreed that "the Manchester massacre" was a calamitous error of judgement on the magistrates' part, but in public very few indeed seemed ready to pooh-pooh the idea of general alarm. The grand juries of Cheshire and Lancashire, with men of opposing political views among their number, both put out

1 Lord Sidmouth to Lord Liverpool, 1 October 1819, *ibid.*

2 Lord Sidmouth to Lord Eldon, 1 October 1819, *ibid.*

alarmist statements; Brougham in a speech at Kendal disapproved meetings on the Manchester model; and the latest edition of Erskine's Defences of the Whigs firmly averred that no "practical and useful Reformation" could come of "violent unmeasured attacks upon the character and constitution of Parliament."¹ The first inkling the government had of a swing away from passivity was Lawrence Dundas's appearance at York Guildhall on 20 September when he publicly demanded a Peterloo inquiry.² Since he had strong connections with Wentworth Woodhouse, it was hard to imagine that he was not working hand in glove with Fitzwilliam, a surmise soon verified when the signatories to the county requisition were advertised a few days afterwards.

As Lord Liverpool maintained, this gave "an entire new Character to the whole Business."³ If the Whigs meant to press for inquiry wherever they were sure of their strength on the platform, not only would it "afford a strong handle to the disaffected" but leave the government's friends in the invidious position of appearing to condone the same by their very silence. In a sense the ministers were now paying the penalty for their precipitate approbation of the authorities' conduct on 16 August. While Canning may have been right, that "to let down the Magistrates would be to invite their resignations & to lose all gratuitous service in Counties liable to disturbance for ever,"⁴ the fact remained that after congratulating them and the military on "their prompt, decisive and efficient measures for the pro-

1 See Papers relative to the Internal State of the Country, nos. 41, 43, PP, 1819-20, iv. 245, 246; The Times, 5 October 1819; The Pamphleteer, xv. 287-316.

2 The Times, 23 September 1819.

3 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 28, 29 September 1819, Sidmouth MSS.

4 Canning to Huskisson, 14 September 1819, Add. MSS. 38741, f. 315. Canning dated the letter 14 August by mistake.

servation of the public tranquillity" the government could on no account admit any need for further inquiry. Had the ministers been able and willing to propagandise the country like their adversaries much of their embarrassment could have been avoided; but they took the view that parliament was the place where the calumnies and falsehoods the Whigs were circulating might best be rebutted,¹ a view which soon persuaded hard-pressed ministerialists to urge an early meeting. Such representations were awkward to say the least. On the one hand, they seemed to infer the incompleteness of the government's case. On the other, they forced the Cabinet either to ignore the appeal and run the risk of a stormy winter or to accept it and appear the lackeys of public opinion.² The right decision required a nice political judgement.

The Prime Minister agreed to a further Cabinet on the subject the same day he received Sidmouth's expostulatory letter.³ This took place on 8 October when perhaps seven or eight ministers attended. Though Lord Liverpool still doubted the wisdom of an early meeting, especially now that party feeling was running high, with the Whigs already active in a dozen counties and the Reformers again up to their old tricks a decision to assemble parliament in November was then and there adopted as by far the safest course.⁴ Indeed, there was probably more argument over the precise date. Liverpool wanted

- 1 In Norfolk, Edmund Wodehouse, a county member, feared a Whig meeting and applied to the Home Office for more accurate information concerning Peterloo. Sidmouth replied that such details were "unnecessary." See Wodehouse to Lord Sidmouth, 29 September 1819, Lord Sidmouth to Wodehouse, 3 October 1819, Sidmouth MSS.
- 2 Liverpool, 11.412-13.
- 3 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 1 October 1819, Sidmouth MSS.
- 4 Since the Cabinet had last met reports of mass meetings at Leeds, Birmingham and Halifax had come in.

towards the end of the month so that Canning would have time to return from Italy, and Sidmouth immediately interpreted this as the cause of the delay all along.¹ The announcement of an extraordinary sitting by no means cut the ground from under the opposition's feet. In nine counties and in numerous towns besides Whigs and Radicals went ahead with protest meetings, which with the steady patter kept up by a partisan press gave the case against the magistrates ample publicity. The government made virtually no attempt to retaliate in kind. Eldon had the bright idea of republishing eighteenth century tracts on the law of public assembly but nothing was ever done,² and the only advice Sidmouth could offer "Friends of the Constitution" was to circulate a loyal address wherever a Whig meeting was threatened. "To call a county meeting unless they had a well-grounded confidence in a favourable result," he told one gentleman, "would ... be improvident; and how can such a confidence be entertained at the present moment when the struggle is between those who have property and those who have none, of which latter description there would be an immense influx, it being next to impossible to exclude from a county meeting inhabitants not being freeholders."³

1 Liverpool, ii. 411-12; Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 1 October 1819, Lord Sidmouth to Lord Eldon, 17 October 1819 Sidmouth MSS.

2 Lord Eldon to Lord Sidmouth, /20 September 1819/, *ibid.*

3 Sidmouth, iii. 275. Lord Grenville was critical of the government's inactivity. After asserting the illegality of the Manchester meeting, he told his nephew: "The Government seems to me to have been much wanting in their own cause & that of the Public, in not taking that ground openly, justifying it themselves, & showing their adherents, who are now in many places frightened & dumbfounded, that this is the doctrine which may be, & must be, maintained. Had this been done at first, the necessity of now prematurely calling Parliament together might I think have been wholly avoided." Lord Grenville to Charles Williams-Wynn, 18 October 1819, Cood-y-maen MSS.

Neither did alliance with the Radicals sorely tax Whig consciences. While plenty in the party admitted to having reservations, it at least obeyed the Burkian credo of popularity and from experience certainly offered the best chance of parliamentary success. The campaign had hardly begun anyway when Fitzwilliam was dismissed from his lord-lieutenancy, an act of political vindictiveness which immediately closed the ranks and brought the stragglers running. In ordering him removed the government, it must be said, fully anticipated as much. Sidmouth first raised the question the same day as the Yorkshire meeting, forty-eight hours before news of the proceedings arrived in London. Viewing his office as more than honorific, Fitzwilliam's offence had already been grievous. As the King's lieutenant he was perfectly free to make representations of his own accord, but "to take a Subordinate Part in a Publick Meeting" at once disgraced his dignity and necessary influence. More serious still, his conduct could be taken as disrespectful to the Prince Regent personally. The latter in his reply to the City of London address had sternly admonished the country not "to institute an extrajudicial inquiry," and after this any meeting constituted a public defiance of the warning. The only consideration which made the government hold its hand was the hope that Fitzwilliam would deepen his offence, making his dismissal more defensible from a parliamentary point of view.¹ As it happened, in this respect he quickly obliged. Where the requisition for the York meeting had been temperately worded, professing uncertainty of the facts, the resolutions adopted there straightly accused the ministers of prejudging the case and approbating a proceeding "which has the appearance of being illegal and highly criminal."²

1 Lord Sidmouth to Lord Liverpool, 14 October 1819, Add. MSS. 38280, ff.137-8; Bathurst, pp.479-80.

2 For the requisition and address see Courier, 9, 16 October 1819.

"He has now," Lord Liverpool declared, "so entirely identified himself with the whole transaction, without even any qualification that can be admitted as an excuse, that I think our forbearance would be ascribed to nothing but timidity, and would discourage our best friends."¹ Hastily, a summons was sent out for a Cabinet meeting to which half a dozen ministers repaired. All that could be urged in favour of restraint was the present disarray of the Whigs and the possibility of a mass resignation if a tough line was taken, but even these advantages lost much of their pertinence when it was pointed out that the natural instinct of an opposition was to oppose and that only one lord-lieutenant was likely to make a martyr of himself. Since the West Riding as a persistent trouble-spot needed a dependable man in command, the result of the deliberation became a foregone conclusion. Fitzwilliam was given notice the very next day.²

Though his removal helped bring erring and faithful Whigs together again, the escalation of the party war did their adversaries much the same service. One of the government's greatest anxieties throughout this period of resurgent radicalism was whether the country gentlemen were prepared to act as toughly as they talked. Of late, especially over public expenditure and legal reform, they had shown a remarkable propensity for moving with the times, and doubts about their attachment to "our happy Constitution" followed inevitably. Wellington was inclined to think that they would shrink from strong measures, Peel too appreciated the force of popular enthusiasm,³ while Lord Liverpool did not even presume to guess their real senti-

1 Bathurst, p.480.

2 Vansittart to Lord Harrowby, 23 October 1819, Harrowby MSS. 16, ff.186-8.

3 Plumer Ward, ii.22, 25.

ments: "until our Friends come regularly to Town," he wrote, "it will be impossible to determine to what extent we can venture to go with a prospect of being Supported in our Legislative Enactments."¹ As soon as the decision to reconvene parliament was made, however, it became imperative to sample non-party opinion, and Arbuthnot was given the job of writing away to thirty or more of "the most important & ticklish" country Gentlemen. The letters were in the form of the usual circular sent out to request attendance, but coming so early and at such a juncture they naturally evoked more than the usual cursory reply. Lord Liverpool for one found the response exceptionally gratifying. Forwarding a packet of letters received to Canning, he remarked: "you will see that the Spirit in which they are written is excellent. I have not as yet heard of any Person on whom we have a right to depend, likely to fail us."² The followings hovering on the government's flank were equally friendly. Bankes and Wilberforce were well-content with the Cabinet's proceedings, Wellesley had already pledged himself "under so dreadful a peril" to offer every support, and the Grenvilles were as ultra-alarmist as ever.³ In these circumstances the ministers could safely look forward to what Sidmouth unabashedly called a united front of "honest and intelligent minds."⁴

Apart from gauging the mood of allies and friends, the government's chief preoccupation throughout October and November was the drafting of measures appropriate to the crisis

- 1 Lord Liverpool to Lord Melville, 24 September 1819, Add. MSS. 38279, f.366.
- 2 Lord Liverpool to Canning, 10 November 1819, *ibid.*, 38568, f.74; Canning to Mrs Canning, 16 November 1819, Canning MSS.
- 3 Henry Bankes to Lord Sidmouth, 24 October 1819, Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 27 October 1819, Sidmouth MSS; Buckingham, *Regency*, ii.337-8; *Liverpool*, ii.418-30.
- 4 *Sidmouth*, iii.297.

and acceptable to parliament. The necessity of legislation was taken for granted. Sidmouth was desperate to augment the magistracy's power, and the Prime Minister's only concern, one Canning also shared, was that the legal intricacies should be properly understood and political possibilities fully explored.¹ The warning, then, against "a mere unavailing relation of plots & treason" which Lord Melville sent down from Edinburgh was needless and perhaps a trifle infuriating.² Time, in fact, was the government's main enemy, for the law officers had just six weeks to prepare suitable measures, no easy task when their superiors were wanting "the means of permanent security." Lord Liverpool, indeed, truly regretted the haste, and in this respect Eldon's coming to Town eleven days before the rest of the Cabinet must have been especially welcome.³ The deficiencies in the law which the Crown lawyers laboured so diligently to correct almost went without saying. Peterloo and subsequent events, always assuming that they were a prelude to actual insurrection, made some limitation of the right of public meeting indispensable, Hunt's release on bail and traverse to the spring assizes argued a need for speedier justice for political miscreants, and the problem of Radical propaganda with its agnostic and seditious overtones was as great as it had ever been. To know what improvements were called for, however, was one thing. To translate them into good law quite another. The law relating to public meetings, for example, was a bewildering amalgam of common law and later legislation, enough to tax the sharpest legal brains let alone a run of the mill magistrate. The great difficulty, but one which the authorities on the spot could

1 Liverpool, ii.413; Canning to Lord Liverpool, 14 October 1819, Canning MSS.

2 Lord Melville to Lord Sidmouth, 8 October 1819, Sidmouth MSS.

3 Liverpool, ii.413; Lord Sidmouth to Lord Kenyon, 31 October 1819, Sidmouth MSS.

never escape, was at what moment a meeting convened for a legal purpose became either an unlawful assembly or riot, dispersible if necessary by force. While the people had an inalienable right to petition parliament or address the sovereign, they had none to assemble in terrorem populi - "in Disturbance of the Public Peace, to the great Terror and Danger of His Majesty's loyal and peaceable Subjects." But how could orderly demonstrations whose real object was revolution be designated a breach or threatened breach of the peace? Could banners be taken as a species of seditious utterance? Could applause at some remark? Could martial music? The point was, though the lawyers were reluctant to admit it, that the law was confronted with something new. At first Eldon was confident that legislation could be drafted declaring what meetings were "dispersible by reasonable application of force,"¹ but eventually even he realised that there was no alternative to the magistrates' discretionary power, and the government fell back on "the limitation of locality" which allowed parochial meetings only.²

Concerning the press, there were similar complexities. A seditious or blasphemous libel was perhaps definable in general terms but in the last resort - thanks to Fox's Libel Act and no censor - it was left to juries and public opinion to set the standards of decent expression. If the government felt the liberty of the press was being abused, all it could really do in the way of new law was to check the publication - publication in its widest sense - of "the Minor Jacobin Prints" it so bitterly reprehended. The difficulty here was parliament's touchiness on the subject of the press's freedom, and more particularly, the need to avoid penalising the virtuous along

1 Lord Eldon to Lord Sidmouth, 4 October 1819, *ibid.*

2 Liverpool, 11.433.

with the wicked. Those "very mischievous cheap publications" which masqueraded as pamphlets to avoid the stamp duty on newspapers could conceivably be taxed out of existence or at least greatly reduced, but if the job was done indiscriminately many exemplary works on manners and religion would also disappear. An explicit reference to political literature was absolutely essential, though even this would destroy much wholesome reading, for "loyalist" papers would go the same way as the rest of the "pauper press." As for occasional works, very little could be done without reintroducing some form of censorship. To increase the penalties for seditious or blasphemous libel had dubious advantages owing to the inconsistencies of the jury system. If the sentence of imprisonment, fine and security for good behaviour which the law at present imposed was extended, or some new punishment devised, there was every likelihood that juries would be harder to please, and the greater the uncertainty of punishment the less the deterrent. Any attempt to restrain circulation was similarly frustrated. Invariably, as soon as a libel action commenced, the offending work gained a notoriety it would never have had otherwise, and yet an injunction against its further sale was unknown in law either before or after conviction. Legal technicalities, especially the traverse allowable in cases of misdemeanour, aggravated the evil tenfold by delaying the court's decision. In Lord Grenville's words, "as great profit often attends the multiplied sale, fine becomes nugatory, and imprisonment cannot be repeated in any proportion of the number of offences committed."¹ To impound copies of an alleged libel was too strong a measure. To suppress a work which had secured a conviction was open to the objections that only part of the whole was declared libellous by the court and that one man could be acquitted, on technical

1 Ibid., p.426.

questions of publication and malice, for what another was found guilty. The most that could be done in these circumstances was to confiscate those copies which were in the convicted person's possession or use and not the work wherever it might be found.

By wholly giving up their holidays the law officers managed to complete their task in nice time for the Cabinet's return. Lord Liverpool moved to his seat near Kingston, Surrey at the beginning of November and asked to see the drafts a day or two later to "apprise ourselves of the real State of any Difficulties which might occur."¹ Since the Cabinet had agreed to reassemble on 8 November and definitely discussed the bills on the 10th, he cannot have found them much in arrears. Six measures, in Radical parlance soon to become the infamous "Six Acts," were decided on. Three sought to destroy the means of intimidation and violence, two its incitement through the press, and one the instigators themselves. Within the first category came the Seditious Meetings Bill, the Training Prevention Bill and the Seizure of Arms Bill. By confining public meetings, except those called by "known constituted authorities," to a parochial level and by prohibiting the slightest semblance of martial array, the government hoped to check "the great evil of itinerant orators, and of all artificial means of excitement." Great care was taken to preserve the right of assembly as much as possible. Only meetings deliberating on "any public Grievance or any Matter in Church and State" were to come within the act's purview, and though notice of time and place was made obligatory so that the magistrates might alter both at their discretion, the power was very limited, just sufficient to make a revolution through simultaneous meetings next to impossible. Bills prohibiting unauthorised military training and permitting the seizure of arms "dangerous to the Public Peace" were a

1 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 28 October 1819, Sidmouth MSS.

natural corollary.

The measures affecting the press, short-titled the Newspaper Stamp Duties Bill and the Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Bill, were cunningly devised to annihilate "twopenny trash" while sparing the unobjectionable, unoffending majority. To deter irresponsible political comment, "the root of the evil" Liverpool and Sidmouth agreed,¹ the first ordered the publishers of periodicals to enter into recognizances as a guarantee of payment if ever they ran foul of the libel laws, and the other made banishment or transportation for fourteen years the maximum penalty for a second conviction. A redefinition of what constituted a newspaper carried the idea of economic war against "political poison" a step further. Only publishers whose works contained "Public News, Intelligence or Occurrences, or any Remarks or Observation thereon" were to give sureties for good behaviour, and these if they appeared at least once every twenty-six days and sold for less than sixpence now became liable to a fourpenny duty Vansittart had imposed in 1815. For the proprietors of cheap weeklies a price rise was inescapable. On pain of £20 fine no periodical outside the definition of a newspaper could be sold for less than sixpence, and with the exorbitant stamp duty twopenny papers like Carlisle's Republican would cost as much if not more. The right to be informed, which the Radicals were zealously contending for, was going to become an expensive privilege. One last insult was offered a free press, though without it the law of libel remained pretty much a dead letter. Ironically enough, the court proceeding which declared a work to be libellous advertised it to the world when the law had no power whatever to check its circulation. By giving the magistrates authority to search for and confiscate all copies in the convicted's possession, the Libels Bill partially

1 Liverpool, ii.434; Sidmouth, iii.297.

corrected this shortcoming, establishing a principle which still remains extant.

The last bill of the six, the so-called Misdemeanours Bill, was to some extent an alternative to a further suspension of habeas corpus. As far as the government was concerned, demagogues and scribblers were the masterminds of the British revolution, and the sooner they were out of mischief behind bars the better. With due observance of the legal process this was extraordinarily difficult to achieve. Charged with a misdemeanour like seditious conspiracy or seditious libel, the accused could demur his plea, traverse the indictment and even postpone his trial to a later assizes, all the while being released on bail. Since the suspension of habeas corpus was perforce a temporary measure, and one which parliament only grudgingly allowed at the best of times, these procedural delays were ever a bane and curse, leaving undesirables at perfect liberty and allowing them, if anything, to win the good offices of public opinion in the interval of waiting. By stopping imparling on several points of law, therefore, notably on the indictment and plea, the Misdemeanours Bill was a valuable addition to the judicial armoury.

Not one of the ministers expected to have all six measures on the statute book before Christmas. Liverpool himself was under no illusion that the Whigs would manage "to make common cause" somehow, however painful a subject sedition was for them, and while the rest got acceptance in principle - another way of saying as far as the second reading.¹ Such discreet confidence was fully justified by the debate on the address. Predictably, since they had been urging the same from the hustings for the past month, the Whigs made a formal

1 Lord Liverpool to Huskisson, 15 October 1819, Add. MSS. 3828C, ff.146-7.

call for an inquiry into "the Manchester massacre." Equally predictably, the Grenvilles and the country gentlemen joined forces with the government to lay the subject to rest. Though Tierney managed to gather 150 votes into the opposition lobby, which was not that much below a full muster and said a great deal for the party's morale, basically the Whig position was embarrassingly weak and remained so throughout the whole of the session. With regard to Peterloo it was pointless to argue the illegality of the magistrates' action. As Eldon put the law: "numbers constituted force, and force terror, and terror illegality,"¹ which left the onus on the opposition to prove that forty thousand people marching past with drums beating and flags flying caused the King's liege subjects no apprehension or alarm. That it had done had already been admitted by the Grand Jury of Lancashire when true bills were found against Hunt and his accomplices and nothing against the yeomanry; and inasmuch as this was the considered verdict of a bench "composed of Persons of all Parties in a Co. divided in Political Sentiment"² the case seemed a clear-cut one, particularly when under common law the magistrates could disperse an unlawful assembly whether the Riot Act had been read or not. The only question concerning Peterloo which admitted of real doubt was the extent of force used, but this was more a political than legal issue. If no felony was committed, and unlawful assembly was no felony, the magistrates were bound to use a "reasonable application of force," neither too much nor too little. Obviously, where to draw the line was always a problem. With a casualty list of eleven killed and some four hundred wounded, Peterloo did seem an example of unnecessary brutality, though the government was quick to point out, as if it really mitigated the case, that

1 Harvard, 1st ser., xli.38.

2 Lord Liverpool to Lord Somers, 20 October 1819, Add. MSS. 38280, f.176.

the people had inflicted a third of these on themselves. The effusion of blood, however, mattered less than the circumstances which had provoked it. Because the country was on the verge of revolution it was enough that the magistrates had done their duty, and to have drawn too fine a distinction between reasonable and unreasonable force would have seriously inhibited the future exertions of the entire civil power. The need to protect the magistracy, in fact, was the essential weakness of the Whig argument. To cast reflections on their good sense at a time when, as the Speech had it, "a spirit is now fully manifested, utterly hostile to the Constitution of this Kingdom," was like sacking the general staff the moment war was declared. And anyway, allegations of illegality and misjudgment came hard indeed from an opposition most of whom accepted the danger meetings like that at St. Peter's Field represented.

Whatever the incongruities of the opposition's case, the defeat of the amendment calling for inquiry did not quite end the discussion of "the Manchester business." Plenty of brief tussles took place when the petitions of victims were brought up and incidental references were continually cropping up in debate. Moreover, the "Papers relative to the Internal State of the Country" which the ministers laid before parliament soon afterwards, included eye-witness accounts by a magistrate and the military commander, and in both Houses the opposition lost no time in proposing to have this information referred to select committees, their game being to have the Peterloo inquiry part and parcel of a general inquiry into present discontents. In attacking on a broader front, however, in trying to press home the government's responsibilities for disorder, the Whigs unquestionably did themselves more harm than good. In the first place, they could not help being accused of making party war to the knife at a time when sedition represented a common enemy. By challenging the Prince Regent's approbation of the Manchester

magistrates they had threatened to do irreparable damage to the authority of the civil power and now they were endeavouring to drag the government through the mire as well. In this sense bickering which took up valuable parliamentary time became irresponsible, even criminal if it deliberately obstructed the passage of measures vital to the country's security. "What was parliament called upon to do by gentlemen on the other side?" taunted Castlereagh at the suggestion of a select committee. "To postpone those necessary measures of safety until a period when, in all human probability, they could be of no avail."¹ Secondly, and even more unforgivable, their case against the government was feeble, poorly developed and very much old hat. Had the ministers, so their argument ran, not pursued a corrupt and extravagant system, had they been as zealous in retrenchment as repression, the people would never have taken the heady wine the Radicals offered them. But agreed that distress was the basic cause of disaffection, could depression really be ascribed the government's fault when peace always brought a massive derangement of supply and demand and when the derangement this time was exacerbated by a growing population, an industrial revolution and world disruption? And whither thirteen years of Tory misrule, with an army and navy cut to the bone, with £14,000,000 in taxes remitted and no sinecures left worth speaking of? Confronted by a threatened "Subversion of the Rights of Property and of all order in Society," what parliament expected of the opposition was not party rant but willing co-operation and where necessary temperate, constructive criticism. After the impressive strides the Whigs had made in regaining the country gentlemen's favour the previous session, all was lost by their absurd and disingenuous performance in this. In accepting the Address in toto the party as a whole fully

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xli.558-9.

acknowledged the country's peril, yet failed to adopt the posture and attitude of a loyal opposition; and the vague declarations in favour of reform Grey and those who followed his example made may have endeared them to the people but also incurred the lasting displeasure of the unattached members who made and unmade governments. Little wonder that a further decade passed before they were a real alternative to the Tories.

Since everyone but the Whigs apparently accepted the seriousness of the situation, the government's measures had a relatively easy passage through both Houses. Indeed, by Christmas four had passed into law and one other only required the Lords' consent to the Commons' amendments. Though predictable noises came from the opposition side avowing the effectiveness of existing law, the rights of Englishmen and an exaggerated alarm, the country gentlemen jibbed at no more than a permanent restraint on public meetings, a sore point Castlereagh anticipated nicely by conceding a trial period of five years. Right willingly they added 10,000 to the military establishment, gave the police unprecedented powers of search and arrest, and regulated much vaunted British liberties from the freedom to arm to the freedom to opine. To say the least, the ministers found their ardour pleasantly reassuring. In the previous session the government could not help sensing a fading attachment for the established order of things, what Peel a few months later called the "more liberal" tone of England, "a feeling ... in favour of some undefined change in the mode of governing the country."¹ So strong was the impression that the ministers remained half afraid that parliament would take on Radicalism with little stomach for the fight. Canning for one thought its spirit had flagged, and even Eldon refused to take for grant-

1 Croker, i.170.

ed its "due & efficacious Aid."¹ Gratifying indeed then, was the alacrity with which the country gentlemen sprang to the constitution's defence. It seemed a welcome confirmation that the government was steering the right course. Some liberalising - Peel thought the new word "odious but intelligible" - there had to be, and measures of penal reform and professions in favour of freer trade had already made it plain that the ministers were not held fast in the ultra-conservative strait-jacket. Over parliamentary reform, however, there could as yet be no compromise, no concessions. By spreading their sails on this issue the Whigs were blown far out to sea while the government continued to cruise in safe water.

After a brief adjournment over the Christmas weekend parliament finally broke up on 29 December with the intention of resuming in the middle of February, somewhat later than usual in view of the special sitting which had gone before. Looking ahead, the New Year surely seemed full of promise. The revenue - the criterion of internal prosperity - was showing progressive improvement, the harvest had been good enough to close the ports while keeping prices relatively high, and except in Scotland where the Radical trouble culminated in the celebrated clash at Bonnymuir the situation in the disturbed districts was quieter than it had been for months. With things in this healthy state even the most hard-bitten pessimist could rejoice that the political trail was likely to get easier and the burdens of government lighter. No one foresaw, no one could foresee the imbroglio which was to bring the royal family into universal contempt, the administration its greatest test and the country near to what would have been the constitutional crisis of the

1 Canning to Huskisson, 14 /September/ 1819, Add. MSS. 38741, f.315, Lord Eldon to Lord Sidmouth, /20 October 1819/, Sidmouth MSS.

century. Just when the ministers were beginning to congratulate one another on the rosy prospect before them, the savage pro-
verseness of Fortune set in motion the train of events which led to the disgusting spectacle of the Queen's trial. On 29 January 1820 attended by his usual retinue George III quietly expired.

The Princess of Wales' conduct had been cause for rumour and speculation almost as long as she had been consort to the heir apparent. From the beginning the marriage had been a disaster, one of those instances of absolute incompatibility which were inevitable when, to quote Wilberforce, matches "contrary to the laws of God and of nature" were contracted among royalty.¹ Since the couple agreed to live apart barely a year after the wedding, gossip came naturally, more so when the husband made no attempt to conceal his loathing and Caroline seemed oblivious to the dignity of her exalted station. Despite the open scandal attending her peccadilloes successive administrations studiously ignored the world's idle chatter, until in 1806 Grenville and his Talents reluctantly concluded that reports of her misconduct were serious enough to warrant formal inquiry. The result of this "Delicate Investigation," as it soon became known, blasted her character for ever, for though the commissioners acquitted her of the gravest charge, that of having reared a bastard child, they were far from admitting her complete innocence. "Other particulars respecting the conduct of her Royal Highness," their report maintained, "necessarily give occasion to very unfavourable interpretations /and these/ must be credited, until they shall receive some decisive contradiction."² For a short time, by granting her a palace apartment and receiving her at court, the King saved her from the full implications of the verdict, but after 1811 with her husband's assumption of the

1 Hansard, 2nd ser. 1.1391-2.

2 Porteus, ix.445-8.

sovereign's prerogatives nothing could save her from his leath-
ing and vindictiveness. Forbidden to visit her daughter when
she chose, denied the entree to the Queen's drawing-room, pub-
licly exhibited as a woman in disgrace when the Continental
despots visited England, she at length resolved to quit the
country indefinitely. On 9 August 1814 she sailed for Cuxhaven
and Europe. It is not inconceivable that her husband toasted
her departure as rumour reported: "To the Princess of Wales's
damnation and may she never return to England."¹

This early, divorce was in nobody's contemplation
simply because a prima facie case of adultery did not exist.
Undoubtedly the Prince Regent saw it as an ultimate happiness,
especially when the constitutional relationship between king and
queen presupposed a public relationship between both, but not
for a moment could he fool himself that one law existed for him
and quite another for the rest of His Majesty's subjects. The
most he could do was to hope that freed from the conventionalities
of royal state, the Princess would shortly destroy herself by
her own indiscretion. Almost as soon as she landed on the Con-
tinent, this seemed very likely. From Brunswick and Strasburg,
Geneva, Milan and Naples reports came flitting back of midnight
romps, daring costume parties and countless other vulgarities;
and not surprisingly the Prince Regent lost no time in ordering
the collection of corroborative testimony. Probably about the
middle of 1815 Cypriotti, the Hanoverian envoy at the Vatican, be-
gan taking down depositions and recruiting spies,² the informa-
tion passing to the Foreign Office through the British embassy
in Vienna.

1 Alice Drayton Greenwood, Lives of the Hanoverian Queens of
England, ii.328 n.1.

2 Brougham knew of a spy in her household in August 1815.
Chester W. New, The Life of Henry Brougham to 1830, p.117.

At this stage the Cabinet had taken no cognizance of Caroline's conduct, and indeed could take none until the Prince Regent expressly commanded it. The information which arrived in the diplomatic bag was forwarded direct to Carlton House for the attention of the Prince of Wales' law officers without the ministers once seeing it. Even so, the government could not long ignore the dangers and difficulties arising from Cempteda's inquisition. Provided nothing could be traced to its agency there could be no objection to the inquiry itself, for the in-
crimination of the Princess would not only deter her from re-
turning home in the event of her husband's accession but justify her exclusion from the honours and privileges of Queen Consort if she did dare venture.¹ What the ministers mostly feared was a proceeding for divorce beginning in the law courts and ending in parliament. Were it simply a private issue between injured husband and erring wife, the case would have been full of complication because the defending party in extenuation of any offence had an inalienable right to produce reoriminatory evidence, which the Prince's profligacy made only too easy. As it was, inasmuch as the nation had an interest in the monarchy's honour and dignity, any proceeding in which the heir apparent was concerned necessarily became an affair of state, and who could answer for the royal majesty if the Fitzherbert marriage of 1785 became public knowledge or if Caroline's lawyers allowed the country to feast itself for months on smut and sex put out by the first family in the kingdom? Moreover, it was vain to hope that politics could be kept out. If the Prince Regent wanted a divorce a vinculo matrimonii, a complete dissolution of his marriage, a bill embodying the annulment would have to be carried through parliament, and there it was certain to be con-

1 Sir Archibald Alison, Lives of Lord Castlereagh and Sir Charles Stewart, iii.217 n.

tested by the friends of Princess Charlotte, for she had no desire to be displaced in the succession, and also those Whigs who could never forgive his desertion of the party in 1812. No good then, the ministers soon concluded, could come of pandering to the Prince Regent's private wishes. Rather let Caroline compromise herself still further than risk the public weal with a shameful exhibition of royal infidelity. "The only prudent course," Castlereagh told his brother who happened to be ambassador at Vienna, "is to augment and confirm the proofs the Prince already has It is the efficacy of the means we are already in possession of to protect him against farther personal annoyance, that ought to make us doubly cautious of embarking in any offensive proceeding, except upon the clearest grounds of practical expediency."¹

But how to tell the Prince that divorce was out of the question? Satisfied that Ompeda's researches and certain other information had made the case against his wife complete, as early as July 1816 he explicitly demanded the Cabinet's opinion on this point. The reply was a masterpiece of non-commitment, one which underlined the government's strategy for some time to come. Since a state of separation was no bar to a divorce suit a proceeding in Doctors' Commons was perfectly feasible. So also was an indictment for high treason. But any British court, the ministers argued, whether ecclesiastical or secular, would take a dim view of a prosecution case founded on the testimony of foreigners, especially foreigners of low station, and yet at this stage that was virtually all there was to offer. Even more damaging, Ompeda had gone about his business "making promises and paying beforehand" which if discovered would destroy the credibility of his witnesses immediately, however convincing their evidence.² On no account could

1 Ibid.

2 Lord Stewart to Lord Castlereagh, 9 January 1816, Londonderry MSS.

further inquiry "into the nature of the Evidence, as well as into the Characters and Circumstances of the Witnesses" be recommended. By now Caroline's legal advisers were on the alert for spies and detectives, and there was no sense in the Prince Regent risking "the advantageous ground" which "in the eyes of this Country and of Europe" he at present held by provoking a premature proceeding. Unless "fresh information or other circumstances" changed the situation dramatically, the ministers concluded, he would do best to bide his time. Little comfort here for a cuckolded husband. "I hope the Prince will continue to be satisfied" was Harrowby's dubious comment when Lord Bathurst sent him the gist of the minute.¹

As it happened, he accepted the rebuff with good grace. Castlereagh who conveyed to him the Cabinet's impressions reported a "great disposition to abide by the Advice which might be offer'd" and the Prime Minister found him "equally accommodating the next Morning."² Not for long, however, would he play the waiting game his ministers recommended. His agents kept hot on the tracks of the Princess and her entourage as they continued their bizarre odyssey from Sicily to Jerusalem, and in June 1817 the Cabinet was again pursuing the latest intelligence.³ Rebuffed a second time, he ordered Leach, his first law officer in his individual capacity, to amass all the available evidence and report his opinion of the case. When he too concluded that "considering the great importance of the subject" impeccable testimony was essential, a commission with no official attachments, the famous Milan Commission, was at once sent to

1 Bathurst, p.423. For the Cabinet minute see HC 126/3 and Add. MSS. 38368, ff.312-18. Lord Bathurst summarised its contents in a letter to Lord Harrowby dated 21 August 1816. Harrowby MSS. 14, ff.78-80.

2 Ibid.

3 Lord Liverpool to the Prince Regent, 26 June 1817, Add. MSS. 38267, f.203.

Italy to make "proper researches."¹ Particularly with regard to this last step the government was being hurried forward much more than it liked, though the increasing obsession for divorce was variously attributed to Leach's skulduggery and the death of Princess Charlotte which the Prince Regent himself admitted removed "much difficulty in point of delicacy."² In their minute of 1816 the ministers had vehemently opposed the idea of "authorizing any Person or Persons ... to make further Inquiries into the Validity of the Testimony already had," and only on the strict understanding that "the question of the expediency of any proceeding must always be considered as an open question" and that the government would provide nothing other than money and letters of introduction did they now acquiesce in the Milan Commission.³

Luckily, before the commissioners could report and the Prince Regent forced the Cabinet to a definite decision, Brougham, who was handling the Princess's case, took an initiative which opened an entirely new prospect. From his brother James staying with her at Pesaro he received word that she was strongly disposed to come to some kind of arrangement and without further ado he wrote to Lord Hutchinson, a stout Whig and personal friend of the Prince Regent, suggesting a formal separation to be ratified by act of parliament, a renouncement of her right to be crowned and use the royal appellation, and the retention of her annuity for the term of her natural life.⁴ Predictably, the Prince immediately interpreted Brougham's move as an acknowledgement of his wife's guilt, as an admission that the Milan commission would find irrefutable proof of criminal misconduct. To him the chance of divorce by amicable arrange-

1 George IV. ii.410-14; Liverpool, iii.11 n.1.

2 Aldon, ii.305.

3 Liverpool, iii.11 n.1.

4 George IV. ii.280-5; Liverpool, iii.15-16.

ment, without the "adverse Proceedings" his ministers were so chary of, clearly beckoned. Needless to say, the government's assessment of the situation was altogether different. While they too heartily welcomed Brougham's overture as a step towards avoiding the public nuisance of a proceeding at law, they were forced to point out to the Prince that separation not divorce was being offered inasmuch as the latter could never "be accomplished by arrangement nor obtained except upon proof of adultery to be substantiated by evidence before some tribunal in this country."¹ On Brougham's terms, of course, the only practical difference between the two was that remarriage was impossible for either party, but since the Prince Regent had no intention of remarrying² and a judicial contest to enable it was hazardous in the extreme as far as the government was concerned such a proposition was perfectly acceptable. Having approved the principle though, the questions which over-shadowed all others was whether the Prince would come to his senses and whether the Princess would endorse a settlement along the lines her legal adviser had proposed. Repeatedly balked, he was obviously counting on the Milan Commission to provide incontrovertible proof. She for her part was unpredictable. At the very time she was telling James Brougham and personal friends of her desire for deliverance, bold letters - the atrocious spelling was a personal hallmark - were being written to Canning and Liverpool announcing her return to England, "her injured character having been once again attacked by false Witnesses."³ In the circumstances the ministers did the best they could. Brougham was

1 Prince Regent to Lord Liverpool, 16 June 1819, Add. MSS. 38190, f.31; Liverpool. iii.17-19.

2 Hobhouse, p.4.

3 Princess of Wales to Lord Liverpool, 1 June 1819, Add. MSS. 38277, ff.202-3; Canning's diary, 1 August 1819, Canning MSS.

encouraged but politely told negotiation required the Princess's authority,¹ and when the report of the Milan Commission was laid before them they again played for time by arguing the insufficiency of the evidence and difficulties over the mode of proceeding.²

The King's death at the end of January 1820 did not so much change the ministers' policy as hasten its fulfilment. As long as Caroline remained Princess of Wales all that the Cabinet had to decide concerning her was whether the nation could afford the sacrifice to her husband's private comfort. Once he ascended the throne, however, the question became pressing whether or not a woman of her repute should be accorded the usual honours and privileges of Queen Consort. By custom, perhaps by right, she had legitimate claims to be crowned, to reside in a royal palace, to have her name included in the liturgy; and because the annuity granted her in 1814 lapsed with George III's demise, if the ministers shrank from defining her prerogatives parliament was certain to do it for them. As it happened, almost the first act of the new king forced them to a decision. The day after his father's death happening to be a Sunday, George suddenly remembered that the prayers for the royal family required revision and sent word to that effect to the Archbishop

- 1 Brougham to Lord Hutchinson, 24 June 1819, Lord Eldon and Lord Liverpool to Lord Hutchinson, 26 June 1819, Add. MSS. 38565, ff.22, 24. The government first replied to Brougham through Lord Hutchinson sometime between 17 and 24 June. The substance of the communication was that "there would be no indisposition, at the proper time, to entertain the principle on which the proposal was grounded, if it should turn out that it met with the approbation and concurrence of the princess." Hansard, 2nd ser., iv.489.
- 2 Minute of Cabinet, 24 July 1819, Add. MSS. 38368, ff.306-11. The document printed in Liverpool, iii.19-22 which purports to be this minute, though mistakenly dated 1820, is actually that of August 1816.

of Canterbury. According to the precedents and the Act of Uniformity which established the liturgy's original form, the alteration was confined to a phrase, but when the Primate proposed to substitute "our gracious Queen Caroline" for "Their Royal Highnesses George Prince of Wales, the Princess of Wales"¹ the King flatly refused to allow any public mention whatever of his wife's new dignity. Such an attitude placed the government in an immediate quandary. In view of his notable tenacity on personal points, if the Cabinet defied him they would dare him to dismiss them. If on the other hand they indulged him they would not only sanction an act of uncertain legality but run the risk - since exclusion implied misconduct - of provoking the Queen into the very proceeding they were desperate to avoid. By a stroke of good fortune no sooner had the King disclosed his wishes than he was laid low with chronic pleurisy, and for the ten days he was incommunicado his ministers had ample opportunity to decide their best course, marshal their arguments and garb their conclusions in careful prose. A formula for unanimity did not come easily, partly because, as the debates in parliament later showed, the rights and wrongs of the case could be argued indefinitely. Canning was wholly hostile to omission and if Croker is to be believed there were others as well.² Only by ignoring the legalities and weighing the political pros and cons was agreement eventually reached. The King, it was decided, was the chief enemy of a settlement short of divorce and in this instance the party most likely to take offence. Where his mood was obdurate the Queen's was conciliatory, or from Brougham's overture six months earlier seemed so at least, and where he invariably made a fetish of personal honour and the royal motier.

1 Archbishop of Canterbury to the King, n.d., Add. MSS. 38282, f.341.

2 Croker, 1.160.

she appeared to live her life with singular disregard for both. Obligated once, there was always a chance he would return the favour when "greater & more essential sacrifices" were demanded. Thwarted, no one could answer for the consequences. A crumb thrown, it seemed to the ministers, might easily do a whole world of good.¹

The Order in Council announcing the alterations in the liturgy appeared in the Gazette of 12 February. Because proscription of privilege made in effect an allegation of misconduct before matters were put in legal train, the proclamation gave or was meant to give public notice that no penal proceeding was in contemplation. Far from prejudging the question, the ministers saw themselves as acting on the public notoriety of her conduct and taking the first step towards an arrangement which would strip her of her royal distinctions while taking full cognizance of her private comfort. Canning was the first to plot this course. He saw at once that the particular question of the liturgy was inextricably related to the Queen's situation in general, that the moment she was deprived of one privilege the government was honour bound to remove the rest, and unless positive action was taken in favour of compromise her advisers might easily be frightened into the only alternative left them - redress at law. Partly by refusing point blank to be a party to any penal proceeding, partly by arguing that after Brougham's offer public opinion would throw the responsibility for further negotiation on the government, within five days he had brought the entire Cabinet round to his way of thinking.² But Canning's was not the only influence. Other circumstances equally compelled the ministers to sort out exactly where they stood regarding divorce. In the previous four or five months important supplementary evidence had come to hand and English members of

1 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 9 February 1820, Canning MSS.

2 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 6 February 1820, *ibid.*; Hobhouse, p.7.

the Princess's suite had been sounded with discouraging results, which made the prosecution's case as complete as it would ever be.¹ Furthermore, following the advice of an earlier minute crucial questions of legal procedure had been referred to the Crown lawyers, and their report had just become available. This statement, along with Canning's strictures, probably had decisive effect in the discussions which ensued, for it made it quite clear that any one of a number of options - a divorce bill, a bill of attainder, an arraignment for high treason or a suit in Doctors' Commons - were all open to serious if not insuperable objections.² When legal impediments made success a matter of doubt, there seemed little point in the ministers risking either their reputations or their sovereign's at the cost of certain public mischief. And perhaps more than this was at stake. A triumphant Queen might assume leadership of the popular party, sedition might again rear its ugly head, and the monarchy might succumb even as the Bourbons did in 1789. An arrangement guaranteed by act of parliament commended itself by the very horror which the alternative inspired.

If a proceeding was going to be avoided either now or in the future, the terms of settlement were all-important. Since deprivation of any kind would immediately impute misconduct, a subtle distinction had to be drawn between privileges which were the sovereign's gift and rights peculiar to the Queen Consort herself. The former, which the government asserted included coronation and mention in the liturgy, could safely be withheld without any disparagement of her constitutional character. The latter could not. Because the abrogation of a right is essentially penal all that the ministers could insist

1 Ibid., p.6; Castlereagh, xii.211.

2 "Opinion of King's Advocate and Attorney and Solicitor General on the case of the Princess of Wales," 17 January 1820, HO 126/3.

was that their exercise be voluntarily suspended. Niceties such as these had to be observed if parliament was to bless a separation without involving itself in "hostile discussions." The moment the Queen was stripped of what few legal rights she possessed, especially the royal title, the question immediately followed whether the deprivation was deserved, whether in fact the allegations of misconduct were true or false. Only honours and privileges conferred by grace and favour, never rights, could be revoked without recourse to judicial process, which meant any impairment of the Queen's dignity parliament did impose resulted purely and simply from the common fame of her indecency and out of regard for the long subsisting separation between her and her husband. An arrangement regulated; it did not condemn. Here, though, a further problem arose. No matter how ingeniously contrived a settlement was, the possibility of repudiation always remained, and of course the awful consequences attending it. As long as the Queen continued to live abroad the government's terms made very little difference to her personal comfort, but in the event of her return just to refuse her coronation or use of the royal appellation would give lasting cause for offence possibly leading to direct legal challenge. At all costs disincentives against her reappearance had to be erected. The obvious way to do this, the Cabinet decided, was to make residence outside the British dominions a condition for the continued payment of her annuity. On her husband's death the marriage treaty entitled her to a jointure of £50,000 a year, but until then she was wholly dependent on whatever parliament or the King on its behalf saw fit to give her. By replacing this dower with an annuity of equal amount payable for the term of her natural life on condition that she stayed abroad, not only would the exclusion appear a public rather than personal act but the alternatives of private comfort and possible ruin would

lie clearly before her. The chief recommendation of the arrangement the government had in mind was that parliament was certain to prefer it to "discussions and disclosures offensive to public decency and likely to disturb the peace of the country." Once carried through, if a proceeding did eventuate, the evil would be the Queen's doing and no other's, and sitting in judgement upon her or simply deliberating on her concerns, parliament was hardly likely to forget it.

Having concluded divorce was too dangerous and a compromise perfectly feasible it only remained for the ministers to communicate their decision to the cuckolded husband. No one among them anticipated an immediate capitulation. Some indeed dreaded outright defiance. As Canning told his wife: "there is one much greater than we still to be reconciled to our decision - & whom it will be a task of no small difficulty to reconcile to it. I am sure that the decision is right for him, for his honour, for his happiness: but I am by no means sure that he will not send us about our business for coming to it." Even so, except for Lord Liverpool, who was his usual jittery self, everyone counted "the greater probability" a royal tantrum followed by royal sulks followed by abject submission.¹ After daily Cabinets for a week or more, the Prime Minister had his first audience on 9 February. Because his colleagues were hard at work rendering their advice both unambiguous and inoffensive, he took no minute with him, though there can be no question that the King was given a full account of all they had been about. Certainly Leach, now Vice-Chancellor, was round at Eldon's early next morning frightening the government with stories that divorce was a sine qua non which the King would even retire to Hanover to achieve.² Needless to say, at this

1 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 6-9 February 1820, Canning MSS.

2 Liverpool, iii.24 n.1. Canning's diary makes it clear that the date was 10 February. Canning MSS.

late stage retreat was unthinkable. Canning and Liverpool put the finishing touches to what must have been a minute of record deliberation, and the latter delivered it to Carlton House on Friday, 11 February.¹ Though the provisions of a bill of separation were already roughly drafted,² the ministers were anxious above all to get the principle of conciliation accepted. Argued with compelling clarity, their minute began by pointing out that decisions regarding the Queen were now "not matters of choice, but of necessity," went on to discuss the manifold difficulties attending any conceivable proceeding, and concluded with a firm avowal that a separation ratified by act of parliament would save the public morals, "the peace of the country," and "your Majesty's dignity and peace of mind."³ A reply came on Saturday afternoon when Eldon, Sidmouth and Liverpool were all summoned to the King's presence after a meeting of the Privy Council.⁴ Probably Leach had drawn up the memorandum which was handed them, for in true lawyer's parlance point was given for point; the remarkable coincidence of the testimony would overcome the prejudice against its origins, recrimination was disallowable where the plaint was public mischief, the Queen could repudiate an arrangement when she chose, and so on.⁵ Set on refusing divorce, however, the ministers were less impressed with Leach's ingenuity than the King's manifest displeasure. According to rumour, and there is no reason to disbelieve it, Eldon and Liverpool met with a brusque reception in the Closet, the King breathing fire,

1 Lord Liverpool to Canning, 10 February 1820, Canning's diary, 10-11 February 1820, *ibid.*

2 See memorandum in Canning's hand, 6 February 1820, *ibid.*

3 Liverpool, *iii.25-32.*

4 Hobhouse, p.8.

5 Liverpool, *iii.34-8.*

brimstone and dismissal if his wishes were thwarted.¹ Such a threat had to be taken seriously. Most men living could remember at least one occasion when George III had parted with ministers over a difference of policy, and if divorce really was an irrevocable point of conscience and personal honour it was by no means unlikely that his son would follow suit, gambling on Tory restraint and Whig ambition to see himself through.² Castlereagh for one was so sure he would try the experiment that he considered the government "as virtually dissolved" and anticipated receiving Metternich, who was contemplating a visit, not as minister but "as a Kentish farmer."³ Not that the mood of despair lasted very long, for word soon came that the King's discretion was gradually getting the better of his valour. A day or two after the unpleasantness at Carlton House his private secretary secretly advised delay and a soothing reply, at the same time encouraging Castlereagh to warn him of unfavourable foreign reactions,⁴ and thus emboldened the ministers took firm hold of the trailing lead and eventually brought him to heel. Though the second minute was mild and conciliatory without the Cabinet budging an inch,⁵ it was in fact Castlereagh's intervention which finally proved decisive. The Prime Minister, interestingly enough, after the outburst against him in the Closet was never again in the King's good graces. A few days later George was complaining of his deficiencies "both in manner and temper" and henceforward it was remarkable that Sidmouth,

1 The Greville Memoirs, 1814-60 (ed. Lytton Strachey and Roger Fulford), 1.89. According to Hobhouse, p.8. the King "expressed himself with a particular warmth of affection towards Lord Sidmouth."

2 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 15 February 1820, Canning MSS. In 1783, 1801 and 1807 George III dismissed his ministers or forced them to resign.

3 Castlereagh, xi.213-14.

4 Hobhouse, pp.8-9; Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1.2-3.

5 Liverpool, iii.38-44.

Wellington or Castlereagh handled the royal huffs and pets.¹ The latter saw the King on Monday, 14 February and again two days later just before the interment of George III's remains at Windsor Castle. According to Canning, the first interview, which lasted five hours, "began with threats but ended with remonstrance & supplication." Castlereagh certainly came back with the impression that his resume of the recriminatory matter the defence might urge had left the King thoroughly chastened. The second audience, anyway, revealed a definite change of heart. A request that Castlereagh discover whether the government would pledge itself to divorce should the Queen "force enquiry" was a last desperate attempt to hobble if not halt the ministers. Turned down, the King reconciled himself to unconditional surrender.² On Thursday morning, the same day parliament reassembled, he announced, "for the sake of public decorum and the public interest," "this great and painful sacrifice of his personal feelings."³

One great question remained outstanding. The King had made his peace with his government, but would the Queen with him? All that the ministers really know of her disposition was what Brougham deigned to tell them, and though he readily assured Lord Liverpool that he would do his utmost to carry an arrangement, the fact remained "that there was a difference between proposing to her to give up advantages which she now enjoyed, but which did not belong to her when the former proposition was made."⁴ If the Queen, wilful and irresponsible as

- 1 Hobhouse, p.9. Lord Liverpool had a nervous, highly sensitive temperament which the King probably disliked. By comparison Sidmouth, Wellington and Castlereagh appeared urbane and imperturbable.
- 2 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 15 February 1820, Canning MSS; Hobhouse, p.9; Croker, i.161; Mrs Arbuthnot, i.3.
- 3 Liverpool, iii.44-5.
- 4 Ibid., pp.54-5.

she was, took it into her head to return to Great Britain the government could never, without being inconsistent with itself, acknowledge her regal dignity, and an inquiry then became necessary either to vindicate or refute the proscription whatever the calamitous consequences. And calamitous they seemed likely to be. Caroline had been a plaything of parties as long as her conduct had been public comment, the Radicals were bound to regard the monarchy's disconcertment as the chance of a lifetime, and even if the country did manage to avoid "a convulsion" Canning was committed to resignation which would be an irreplaceable loss. Much, too much depended on a woman's whim.

DIGRESSION: THE TRIAL OF THE QUEEN.

For the moment the Queen was forgotten. By the Act of Succession of 1707, parliament could continue in session six months after the sovereign's demise, but in view of the improving economic situation and the fast-waning Radical threat, both of which would redound to the government's credit, the Cabinet decided instead on an immediate general election. A new reign brought a mass of business in its train anyway, notably the settlement of the civil list, and with the estimates unvoted, the House of Commons economy-men and members "thinking of cockades, and hustings, and returning officers," it seemed best by far to sit for a week or so, pass a short-term Mutiny Act and then call it quits. The result of the excursion into the country was sobering to say the least. Though the government regained a lot of ground lost in 1818, particularly in Devonshire, Leicestershire and London, in point of numbers the opposition again finished with a slight edge. Duncannon, who managed the election for the Whigs, calculated a gain of four or five, and meeting to decide a bet of Lord Anglesea's, Tierney and Holmes, the latter a Treasury Whip, gave the opposition five in England less minimal losses in Scotland and Ireland.¹ Of course, with allegiances blurred by anti-party professions and the like, the figures could be juggled indefinitely. When party managers had seen nearly three hundred new faces come and go in the last two years,² what mattered more was the spirit of the

1 Mitchell, p.140; Charles Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 3 April 1820, Coed-y-maen MSS.

2 According to Judd, p.28 n.4 247 members without previous parliamentary experience entered the House in the elections of 1818 and 1820, and 36 in intervening by-elections.

return, the apparent leaning of public opinion. In this sky Huskisson read many storms, and he was certainly not alone. As he told Arbuthnot, besides depriving the government of its "best & steadiest props" which would encourage fresh parliamentary unruliness, the election had shown only too clearly "not dislike to the late measures, nor disaffection ... but ... a soreness on every subject connected with expence, a clamour for economy, a feeling growing out of the present straightened circumstances of the Yeomanry contrasted with the ease which they enjoyed during the War." Assuming this protest was given increasing political direction, he continued, "the Period may not be remote, in which we may find it necessary to do something to secure the affection & more cordial goodwill of some great Class in the State."¹ To him it seemed then, the government could no longer run before the storm. It was time to tack and turn about. Almost to the day Peel was writing in much the same vein to Croker.²

The behaviour of the new parliament did nothing to bely these gloomy expectations. Throughout the session until the Queen's coming captured the headlines, the government grappled constantly with recalcitrant country gentlemen. "You will see hardly any addition of names to the Opposition, or any increased numbers, but the feature is the want of attendance of the Government friends," one member observed.³ As in the past it was over the issues of distress that this was most marked. Hitherto a laggard economy had been a stick to chastise the government which the Whigs out of political spleen had mainly wielded. Now it became a prod handled more by the independents to secure great and lasting remedies - frugality in the public expenditure, the relaxation of the old commercial system, the

1 Huskisson to Arbuthnot, 24 March 1820, Add. MSS. 38742, ff.6-8.

2 Croker, i.170.

3 Buckingham, George IV, i.19.

revision of the corn laws, and to one or two daring spirits reform of the representation itself. Of these the first, the gospel of economy, had long been preached in and out of the House, so much so that it had become almost second nature for the government to pare down every departmental estimate that came before it. Remembering past tussles over the cost of the monarchy and royalty in general, in 1820 "the fightable matter" promised to be the civil list customarily settled at the start of the reign. While Huskisson was fearful lest the government offend parliament, and therefore the country, with too generous a proposal, his superiors were dead scared of the King to whom the subject was "of a sort to worry & agitate him excessively."¹ Liverpool, indeed, wanted the matter cut and dried as quickly as possible. "Time," he explained to Arbuthnot, "will be requisite to reconcile the King's mind to the arrangement, and we must not put this off, as we were obliged to do in the case of the Princess to the last moment."² Sometime in March the Treasury sent out letters to the Lord Steward, the Lord Chamberlain and the Master of the Horse requesting estimates for their departments, and the informal committee consisting of Huskisson, Long, Vansittart and the Prime Minister which settled financial business arranged to meet straight after Easter.³ Probably before the consultations began there was general agreement that there could be no going back on the 1816 arrangement.⁴ From the point of view of both economy and good government, though the Treasury had had to keep a sharp eye on things, this had

1 Huskisson to Arbuthnot, 24 March 1820, Add. MSS. 38742, ff. 8-9; Canning to Mrs Canning, 15 February 1820, Canning MSS.

2 Arbuthnot, p.19.

3 Ibid.; Hobhouse, p.18.

4 e.g. See Huskisson to Arbuthnot, 24 March 1820, Add. MSS. 38742, f.9. "... sanguine indeed must be the turn of that Wind, which (if the Enquiry is to be transferred from Fife House to the House of Commons) can indulge even the faintest

given little cause for complaint, the expenditure keeping pretty much within the estimates then decided.¹ Unfortunately the Household officers and George himself chose to think differently. When the new estimates were returned to the Treasury they were found to exceed the old by £65,000, and no sooner had the Cabinet reduced them to a respectable amount than the King made a protest of his own. At first he was persuaded into an ungracious submission, but when the Speech was sent him he proposed alterations in the paragraph relating to the civil list so insolent and provoking that Lord Liverpool believed the government's days were numbered. Frantically he spent Sunday sending high and low for ministers, and at a Cabinet meeting the following day they emphatically reasserted that the income intended was "fully sufficient" to maintain the Crown "in as ample a manner as ... any Sovereign for more than a century." Once again confronted by ministerial intransigence the King yielded, though not without his usual spitefulness. A few days afterwards he was asking Sidmouth whether he and his colleagues regarded themselves as his servants or Lord Liverpool's.²

When the civil list came up for parliamentary discussion, as always a habitual stinginess on "topicks of money" paid off handsomely. The opposition took the view that the arrangement of 1816 had been wildly over-generous and that parliament should become the accountant for the "casual" revenues of the Crown, but by pointing out the recency of inquiry, the Crown's solvency since then and the habit of reg-

hope of doing better for the Crown than we did in 1816 I am sure, if we ask for more, that like the Dog in the Fable, we shall drown ourselves by gnashing at a shadow; & that instead of getting that more, we shall see the Crown hampered & curtailed in some of the Powers & facilities which it possesses over the Revenue now at its disposal."

1 Memoranda on the civil list, n.d., *ibid.*, 38369, ff.140-6, 147-155.

2 *Hobhouse*, pp.18-20; *Bathurst*, p.483; *George IV*, 11.324-6; *Mrs. Arbuthnot*, 1.14, 15; *Eldon*, 11.362-3.

ular information which had grown up this was easily quashed. A motion of Brougham's to incorporate "the Droits of the Crown and Admiralty, Four-and-half per cent West India duties, and other funds not usually deemed hitherto to be within the immediate control of Parliament" into the civil list failed by over a hundred votes, and Lord John Russell's attempt to force inquiry met a similar fate. Content as the ministers were with their work of four years before, it was left to a new reign and new men, the same who now argued it, to take the logical step of finally separating the charge of government from that of the Crown's dignity and comfort.

This early success did not long go unavenged. If the ministers congratulated themselves that they had fairly gauged the mood of the House, they were soon given a rude reminder that economy was an issue which one debate could never lay low. Inexpensive government was a general end attainable only if a host of particular ends were made the means. One such now came to parliament's attention. As far back as 1814 commissioners had been appointed to prepare for the economical reform of the Scottish law courts, and in their sixth report, tabled in 1819, they recommended four judges in the Court of Exchequer, including the Chief Baron, in place of the customary five. Doubting whether the Act of Union or the constitution of the court allowed the change, the government sought the opinion of the superior judges who unequivocally disapproved.¹ Their authority was taken as conclusive, and a puisne baron having announced his resignation the vacancy was immediately filled up by the promotion of the court's remembrancer. Though the saving would have been "some paltry thousand pounds," a little more since the remembrancer's office lapsed with the expiration of the existing interest, the Whigs raised a hullabaloo as soon as

1 PF, 1819, xi.183; 1820, vii.261-4.

parliament reassembled, loudly complaining that a job had been done and that commissions of this nature formed a smokescreen behind which the government carefully cultivated the canker of corruption. Much to the ministers' chagrin many country gentlemen were willing believers. When Lord Archibald Hamilton asked the House to endorse the commissioners' recommendation well over thirty joined the opposition despite Castlereagh's promise of a committee, and the government counted itself lucky to scrape home with a majority of twelve.¹ In this way, by occasional rebuke, by an occasional twist on the rack of parliament's displeasure the ministers were taught parsimony as a prize virtue, as indeed it was and long would be. Freer trade, the revision of the corn laws were the pet panaceas of separate interests, parliamentary reform was the enthusiasm of a minority of limited respectability, but economy was a hobbyhorse which the whole nation rode with style and verve. A day after the near defeat the Prime Minister and Arbuthnot casually wondered whether an infusion of new blood was needed, as if to deplete the opposition would solve all. Mrs. Arbuthnot could have set both of them right. "A junction ... wd only add a few individuals," she mused in her private journal, "& wd not give ... the least more hold on the mind & opinion of the nation generally, which is in fact what the present Government wants the most."² An exemplary stinginess continued to be the master key to popularity and parliamentary quiet.

The attacks on the corn laws and the old commercial system were born of the same frustration - unrelenting distress - but sired by different, most would say competing interests. Though the act prohibiting the import of corn until a remunerative price had been reached was largely their handiwork, the

1 For the debate see Hansard, 2nd ser., 1.347-86.

2 Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1.18-19.

agriculturists had been protesting against its imperfection and unfairness from the day of its first enforcement. As early as 1816 "Squire" Western criticised the warehousing clause for allowing the stockpiling of foreign grain,¹ and this and other shortcomings became the main bone of contention between the landed interest and the government thereafter. Increasingly, irrespective of the fact that a large minority was unconcerned, petitions which had grouched on every subject under the agriculturist's sun, from the distillery laws to the duties on rape seed, became diatribes on a single injustice. From 1819-21 no less than 1200, "all of them complaining of the principle and operation of the law of 1815," were brought up to Westminster, "the greatest number of petitions," it was later said, "ever presented to parliament upon one subject."² In comparison the commercial classes seemed both timid and undecided, though what with a general recession in world trade and the protectionist leanings of foreign powers they probably had far greater cause for complaint. The first petition in favour of freer trade came as late as 1820, and even then Tooke's attempt to rally the City nearly ended in dismal failure. Until Samuel Thornton, a former Governor of the Bank of England, lent his support, signatures came very slow indeed, a disappointment which prompted the sponsor to jibe in after years that the ministers were "more sincere and resolute Free Traders than the Merchants of London."³ Partly the reluctance resulted from the Tories smelling a Radical rat, for Tooke was one of Ricardo's devotees. Partly also it stemmed from the proposal's generality and abstractness. Where the landed interest was questioning the workableness of a particular law, the mercantile was being asked to affirm a completely new faith. Many accepted the Smithian gospel of the free movement of capital but when the time came to

1 Hansard, 1st ser., xciii.48-9.

2 Ibid., 2nd ser., xvii.988.

3 R.L. Schuyler, The Fall of the Old Colonial System, pp.99-100.

profess and practise it with the instinctive canniness of men of affairs most hung back. And understandably so. In the midst of distress a measure of state regulation and interference naturally appeared more of a blessing than a disaster, and with any revision of the tariff laws one man's gain was bound to be another's loss. A whole host of examples showed that profit was the god of commercial men and self-interest their creed. As Robinson, the President of the Board of Trade pointed out: "In all the communications which he had had with persons engaged in trade, he had never heard the general principle /of greater freedom/ denied, but he never could get the individual to allow that the general principle ought to be applied in his case."¹ The wool grower wanted a heavier duty on foreign wool and a bounty on export; the manufacturer wanted neither. The farmer wanted rape seed in quantity; the whale industry did not. Propose to reduce the duty on exported coal and the glass manufacturers saw red. Tamper with that on foreign linen and the President of the Board of Trade was burnt in effigy over half of Northern Ireland.² In 1820 the government was not swept away on a tide of merchant enthusiasm because cross-eddies made the current barely perceptible. Moreover, where the agriculturists had their Agricultural Association and a propagandist of George Webb Hall's calibre the commercial class had nothing. Fewer than a dozen towns had time to follow London's lead before parliament took up their grievances.

For the next two years the irony of the situation was that the government, supposedly dependent on the votes of the country gentlemen, paid less attention to the clamour set up by agriculturists than the tepid agitation of the commercial

¹ Hansard, 1st ser., xxxv.1046.

² Robinson pointed these examples at the House. Ibid., xxxiii. 697-8, xxxv.1050-1.

interest. Looking back the attitude was not surprising. Except for one or two trifles, mainly the method of calculating the averages, the ministers could fairly claim that the corn law had worked, which was both a presumption in favour of its continued working and a cogent reason for non-interference now. The great object of the act had been to secure the farmer a fair price and a degree of protection against cheaper foreign produce, and with the price of wheat averaging out at over 78s. a quarter and importations no heavier than before this had surely been achieved.¹ As the government saw it, the agriculturists had to learn to cut their coat according to their cloth. Whatever George Webb Hall said, they already had a protection comparable to the manufacturing interest, and to expect the ministers to continue "the unnatural prosperity" of the war period for their exclusive benefit was asking the government to forsake its essential arbitral role. Even to tamper ever so slightly with the act of 1815 might do irreparable harm. Few men could forget the ugly scenes in the metropolis at the time of the bill's passing, nor the parliamentary wrangles and mass meetings. No administration in its right mind would invite a repetition when the common people were at last beginning to settle down into their usual complaisance, especially when the means of protest were limited by unpopular laws. "Surely common prudence," Castlereagh thundered in the House of Commons, "would suggest that every topic of discontent ought to be avoided at a moment when general distress pressed upon every class of society."² The warning did not pass unheeded, even in a parliament of landlords. Though Holme-Sumner, the member for Surrey, carried a committee to consider the agricultural petitions, the government succeeded in quashing a "broad inquiry"

1 Ibid., 2nd ser. 1.580-1, 643-6.

2 Ibid., 727.

the day following. Robinson had already suggested confining the terms of reference to the method of taking the averages and legal loopholes, but on the main question a procedural technicality had prevented this amendment from being put. By now carrying an instruction along these lines, which it was mandatory for the committee to observe, the ministers made good the mischance and gained the corn laws a wholesome respite.

The landed interest had to be bullied out of uncompromising ways: merchants and manufacturers had to be subtly encouraged into better, for it was probably true that the government was not merely abreast of commercial opinion but a little in advance. Certainly as far as a declaration of principle went the commercial classes were beaten easily. In March 1816, a full four years before the City's famous petition, Robinson was asserting that the "system of prohibitions" had gone far enough, "if not indeed too far," and twelve months later on a motion of Brougham's on the state of the economy he was no less castigatory.¹ Nor was his a voice in the wilderness. Both Huskisson and the Prime Minister, heavyweights when it came to such matters, were true believers without it being so generally known. When a small deputation of City merchants called at Fife House in May 1820 Tooke was agreeably surprised to find how much Lord Liverpool's opinions coincided with his own.² On the government's part, then, there was no sudden conversion born of the exigencies of the political moment. Rather there was a sudden rush to translate a pet theory into practice, though even then the change had small beginnings and mainly gained its momentum from altering economic circumstances. In the immediate post-war period it was obvious that very little could be done. Apart from the repeal of a handful of out-

1 Ibid., 1st ser., xciii.698, xciv.1044-52.

2 Schuyler, pp.99-100.

rageously obsolete statutes, which showed the spirit was willing,¹ it was impossible to escape the trammels of a protective system when trade and industry were everywhere crying out for relief. To the theorists, of course, prosperity, ever increasing prosperity was an inevitable blessing of freer trade, but to convince the mercantile class that it was so when war in South America upset one valuable market, when foreign powers were bent on protectionist policies and when the prospects of reciprocity remained yet dim was beyond any administration's capabilities. Moreover, the strength of vested interests and the state of the revenue could not be ignored. With two-thirds of the revenue drawn from the customs and excise and an increase in direct taxation out of the question the government could hardly afford freer trade when a risk remained that it would fail to bring in a compensating amount, and even supposing the experiment was made in the midst of distress the protestations of interested parties were bound to deepen the prevailing sense of grievance and disillusionment. A system which was the cumulative growth of several centuries - the customs had a schedule of over three hundred duties to enforce - commended itself by its mere survival and was by no means easily demolished. Until the world struggled out of the depression that had it in thrall the government could only bide its time. "If the people of the world are poor," Lord Liverpool reminded the House of Lords, "no legislative interposition can make them do that which they would do if they were rich."²

Contrary to what is usually supposed, the government's change of heart in 1820 was dictated less by an improvement in the economic situation than the dreary prospect of continuing distress. As was to be expected when properly collated the

1 Hansard, 2nd ser., i.183.

2 Ibid., 575.

trade figures of the previous year made fairly dismal reading, and while there was an increasing promise of better things to come no one could know for certain that the country had at long last broken out of the vicious circle of recurrent depression and temporary boom. After two general elections, through their subtle contacts with "public opinion," the ministers became convinced that dissatisfaction with the government had reached unreasonable proportions. Huskisson had warned the Prime Minister that the time might be coming when they could no longer sit back and let the countervailing economic forces resolve themselves,¹ and when the decision in favour of a liberal trade policy was finally made it sprang wholly from this feeling. Most emphatically, it did not represent an attempt to neutralise the resentment of the landed interest with the goodwill of the commercial classes, for if the truth be known freer trade was likely to offend quite as many as it pleased. Rather it was a recipe for the prosperity of the nation according to the usual government formula that the wealth of the land was inextricably bound up with the wealth of commerce. So momentous a decision, a question so complicated by the sheer multiplicity of the interests involved, made the first steps naturally hesitant. Robinson avowed in the House that he was ready to revise the timber tariff without further ado,² but to be perfectly sure of their ground - though the City's petition was remarkably well received³ - the ministers reverted to the idea of select committees to test parliament's cordiality on the general principle. These were voted unanimously on 26 May in the Lords and 5 June in the Commons, the proper beginning of a commercial era which was to last almost a century. Since eras are pardon-

1 Huskisson to Lord Liverpool, 24 March 1820, Add. MSS. 38742, f.7.

2 Hansard, 2nd ser., i.183.

3 Buckingham, George IV. i.20, 21.

able generalisations which disguise all manner of interruption and exception, in a sense the start was appropriately bungled. Each committee presented a report within six weeks of its inception, but no sooner was this first turf cut than the work had to be temporarily given up. The Queen had arrived and her concerns held pride of place for the rest of the year and some time after.

The feature of Caroline's return at the beginning of June was its very unexpectedness. Though she muttered every sort of imprecation and threat in letters to friends, even trying to frighten Lord Liverpool with an ungrammatical ultimatum,¹ not for a moment did anyone take her seriously, a point of view more than verified by her continued sojourn at Rome throughout February, March and most of April. Nor did Brougham's attitude lead the government to suspect monkey business. In an interview with the Prime Minister on 18 February he promised to do his utmost to avert a proceeding, a few days afterwards in parliament he called the omission from the liturgy a "trifle light as air," and all along he made it perfectly plain that in his definition "some convenient place" for negotiation meant near at hand just across the Channel.² Complete and utter reliance on Brougham was, it turned out, the ministers' great mistake. As the Queen's legal adviser, and after April her first law officer, he was bound to consult his client's interest before any other. Also as a leading light among the Whigs he could not be blamed for having an eye to political advantage. But the greatest calamity of all was that he was too clever by half, a juggler who in one move thought he could advance himself, serve the Queen and save the nation. From the start he played a deep and difficult game, on the one hand trying to

¹ Liverpool, iii.46-7.

² Ibid., pp.54-5; Hanstead, 1st ser., xli.1626.

frighten the government into generous concessions, on the other warning the Queen against the mad folly of a contest at law. In February he reminded Lord Liverpool that the Queen "was a woman of such strong passions, he could not answer for her following his advice," the same day writing to a lady-in-waiting: "If she arrives plump on you at Paris make her either stay there or at Calais till I can come out to her."¹ In March, in the sure knowledge that every word would be passed on to the Pavilion and Fife House, he hinted the Queen's growing popularity and soundly abused the ministers for encouraging her to drive a hard bargain by letting their newspapers "praise them on account ... of their constitutional firmness in resisting the King."² In April and May he was assiduous in arranging a Continental rendezvous, meanwhile lashing the government for forcing Denman and him to present their credentials as the Queen's law officers, a degree of recognition, he warned, which would make her more intractable than ever.³ The tragedy was that there was no one else but Brougham. Of her former champions Perceval and Whitbread were dead, and Canning's intimacy had faded with the years, which led the government to conclude that "Mr. Harry" was her truest friend and the one whose influence was paramount.

The belief that everything depended on his good offices was only too apparent in the famous squabble over his taking silk. Eldon had refused him the honour, to which his standing at the Bar alone entitled him, on two occasions, but in March 1820, about a month before the courts opened for their Easter term, he re-

1 Hobhouse, p.10; Now, p.232.

2 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.72-3. The letter which is also found in Add. MSS. 38284, ff.27-8 was probably written on 30 March 1820.

3 Brougham to the Queen, 29 April 1820, Brougham to Lady Charlotte Lindsay, /29 April 1820/, the Queen to Brougham, 7 May 1820, Brougham to the Queen, 13 May /1820/, Add. MSS. 38284, f.302, 38565, ff.101, 102, 115-16; Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.73.

newed the application to avoid the embarrassment of his taking precedence as Attorney-General of the Queen. When the Lord Chancellor again turned him down, Canning and Lord Liverpool immediately intervened, not to prevent the assertion of the right, "a miserable point of Etiquette" they were already prepared to concede, but simply to keep Brougham sweet. "I am satisfied that Brougham for his own Interest will be sincere in this Business if he does not consider himself as ill used," the Prime Minister entreated Eldon, to which Canning added: "you can only get /an admission from the Queen/, by consent - & if Br's consent is thrown away, you will have to fight for it, uphill."¹ Even the King realised the importance of the gesture and sent Leach with a peremptory order, though in the end none could budge the Chancellor from his attitude of arrant professionalism.² Brougham, therefore, despite his political animosity and a certain reputation for slippery conduct, was given sole charge of a brief to save the government and the nation. He, it was felt, was under no illusions concerning Caroline's infidelity and would soon bring her round to the precariousness of her present situation. Too late both parties discovered that the Queen had a mind of her own.

To the country at large the Queen's homecoming was a drama from beginning to end. For two months after receiving news of her husband's accession she dallied at Rome, finally setting out for her rendezvous with Brougham about the middle of April. Detained nearly a week in Milan by a rheumatic complaint, lingering over a fortnight in Geneva until Brougham prodded her forward, she did not reach St.Omer until the begin-

1 Lord Liverpool to Lord Eldon, 3 April 1820, Canning to Lord Liverpool, 2 April 1820, Add. MSS. 38193, ff.113-17, 38284, ff.25-6.

2 Hobhouse, p.20. A good account of the episode is in New, pp.235-7.

ning of June, by which time huge wagers for and against her coming were being laid in all the gaming clubs of fashionable London. Only the government remained relatively unperturbed. From the start Brougham had insisted that she come close to England, and if negotiating was to be done, which everyone thought more than likely, the request seemed perfectly reasonable.¹ Nevertheless, the news of her coming did force the ministers to deliver a formal statement of their terms and also a warning of what would ensue should they be absolutely rejected. Brougham arrived back from Westmorland on 30 March to find a letter from the Queen announcing her imminent departure, and out of common courtesy he immediately sent word to the government through Hutchinson and Bloomfield.² Having the same day received what now appeared a similar intimation,³ Lord Liverpool at once decided that the time to talk business could no longer be postponed. Most of the Cabinet still being on holiday, on his own initiative he summoned Brougham and Hutchinson to Pife House for a verbal summary of the government's conditions. A further briefing and the handing over of a precise memorandum took place a week or so later.⁴ Unbeknown to all of them the Queen had scarcely begun her journey northward.

Out of these discussions the significant development which emerged was an unqualified commitment on the part of the Cabinet that some proceeding - no one knew what sort - would be instituted the moment the Queen set foot in Great Britain.⁵ The proposition handed Brougham was identical to what the

1 Liverpool, iii.55, 59.

2 Brougham to Lord Hutchinson, /30 March 1820/, Add. MSS. 38284, ff.27-8; George IV, ii.318-19.

3 Liverpool, iii.46-7. Since the courier to Brougham left the Queen on 16 March the letters presumably arrived together.

4 Ibid., pp.56-7.

5 Ibid., pp.56, 58; Lord Liverpool to Lord Hutchinson, 20 April 1820, Brougham MSS.

ministers had already proposed in their February minutes, indeed almost identical to what he himself had suggested the previous year. Provided Caroline engaged to stay abroad, forgo her royal title and leave her other rights, except her legal patronage and judicial privileges, in abeyance, the Crown was willing to recommend to parliament that she have an annuity of £50,000 for the rest of her natural life.¹ With respect to what would follow should this arrangement fall through, up to now the ministers had stoutly refused to have their hands tied. In view of the risks to be run, whether to take legal cognizance of Caroline's misconduct was a problem they preferred to leave until circumstances forced an answer. To the King at least, the pledge presently given must have seemed a surprising retreat, but it was in fact more a species of ministerial consistency than misjudgement. In February the great need had been to reconcile George to separation as a preferable and sensible alternative. In April it was to frighten his wife into precisely the same state of mind. Since the government had reopened the door to an arrangement the ministers had become increasingly conscious of their meagre bargaining strength, of just how much there was to tempt the Queen into the horrible madness of a judicial contest. Merely to invite negotiation, as they had done, could be interpreted as a marked reluctance to proceed to extremes, or worse as an absolute refusal to seek legal satisfaction. Furthermore, once accepted by the Queen any derogation of right constituted an admission of guilt which a prosecution would otherwise have to prove, and an adverse vote in parliament could deprive her of an income as surely as an adverse verdict in a court of law. Somehow she had to be told that the case against her was overwhelming and that the

1 "Memorandum for a proposed Arrangement with the Queen," 15 April 1820, PP, 1820, xii.533.

government was not frightened to produce it. Not for nothing did Lord Liverpool warn Brougham that an imputation of forgery¹ hung over her as a result of a suit in the Court of Chancery. Not for nothing were the consequences of her coming placed squarely before her.

Caroline reached St.Omer on 1 June, two days before Brougham and Lord Hutchinson arrived to bring to fruition a policy which had gradually shaped itself over most of five years. Yet the negotiation which followed lasted a bare twenty-four hours. It failed not because Brougham played the government foul, though the ministers never ceased to think it, but because his cleverness in the end proved a two-edged weapon. His game was too deep for her, their acquaintance too shallow. Where he came with an innocent determination to wring the best possible terms from a government he knew to be on the defensive, she came inherently suspicious of being double-crossed by an artful lawyer, a political adventurer and an uncertain friend.²

- 1 In a bill filed in Chancery in 1818 Caroline demanded payment of a considerable sum from her brother's, the late Duke of Brunswick's estate. Two promissory notes drawn up in August 1814 were the basis of the claim, but the executors had serious doubts concerning their authenticity. When the plaintiffs failed to produce one of them according to the order of the court the bill was dismissed with costs. See Clement Tudway Swanston, Reports of Cases argued and determined in the High Court of Chancery, i.114-27, 580, 111.567-72.
- 2 Lord Hutchinson who accompanied Brougham to St.Omer was only too aware of the Queen's mistrust "In the whole of this disagreeable discussion," he wrote to Sir Benjamin Bloomfield, "I have had one uniform impression on my mind to endeavour to screen Brougham from the imputation that he was acting in concert with us and that he was a negotiator as much employed by the Government as by the Queen. From what you know this was a task not quite so easy to perform: some suspicions might with some little degree of apparent truth attach to him and I am led to imagine, from a variety of circumstances, that the Queen did not place implicit confidence in him." George IV, 11.341.

In his first interview with her he learnt the limitations of his influence, not even daring to mention the proposition he was authorised to present lest she order post horses for Calais there and then,¹ and from the moment it dawned on him he tried his utmost, quite unavailingly, to win back her confidence and gain time any way he could. It was here that Lord Hutchinson was called in to play his part. Because Brougham himself could hardly tell his client she had reason to fear inquiry, Hutchinson was at St.Omer to enforce the government's warning of the dire consequences of her landing, actually carrying a letter to that effect from the Prime Minister.² Of this the Queen knew nothing. She assumed, naturally enough, that he was the bearer of the government's proposition, and when Brougham saw her mood he subtly encouraged her mistake in order to gain what seemed likely to be immensely precious hours. Before the misunderstanding was sorted out, he calculated, London might have sent a reply to his demand for recognition of the Queen abroad, and a courier might have arrived from Paris enabling Lord Hutchinson to make contact and prolong the negotiation even further. Fortunately when Brougham requested the conditions of settlement Hutchinson kept his head, pleading for "a short delay" to draw up a proposition which "has not been conveyed to him in any specific form of words." "I thought that his object was to gain time," he wrote later. "I answered it under that impression, he has since acknowledged to me that my impressions were correct and that in the answer I gave, I had entered into his views." It was the Queen herself who spoilt all.

1 Liverpool, iii.65-7.

2 Ibid., pp.56-9; Lord Liverpool to Lord Hutchinson, 20 April 1820, Brougham MSS.

3 Brougham, The Life and Times of Henry Lord Brougham, ii. 357-8.

4 George IV, ii.340.

Headstrong and impulsive, her suspicions heightened by finding a negotiator unready to negotiate, she gave Hutchinson a bare three hours to state the government's terms, made preparations for her departure meanwhile, and petulantly demanded an answer before her ultimatum even expired.¹ Not knowing that Brougham's brother had surreptitiously left him Lord Liverpool's memorandum, Hutchinson did his best to paraphrase it from memory while faithfully passing on the warning that a proceeding would be the inevitable outcome of a landing in England. The errors he made - he said nothing of rights the Queen might retain and declared that no royal title would be allowed her - did not matter. Caroline had made up her mind to go if her innocence was not acknowledged and that was that. Peremptorily rejecting the offer of the government per pro Hutchinson, she was on her way to Calais five minutes after.² Even then Brougham refused to admit defeat. On his advice Hutchinson offered to convey her terms to the ministers, and this he followed up by recommending an arrangement whereby she would have full recognition abroad in return for a voluntary exile.³ But both letters, which reached her in the early hours aboard a packet lying off Calais pier, were scarcely given a glance. The afternoon of the same day she was stepping ashore on Dover beach. Hutchinson, ruminating on the utter failure of the government's plans, caught its essence in a couple of sentences: "... in the whole of this negotiation, Mr Brougham ... does not appear to have possessed the smallest degree of power, weight, or authority over the mind of the Queen I believe she took counsel from her own rashness, presumption, and obstinacy alone."⁴

1 Brougham, ii.359; Liverpool, iii.73.

2 Brougham, ii.359-61; George IV, ii.341; Liverpool, iii.68.

3 Brougham, ii.361-5; Liverpool, iii.73.

4 Ibid. See also George IV, ii.343.

According to their pledge the ministers presented both Houses of parliament with "certain Papers respecting the conduct of Her Majesty" while Caroline's carriage was yet rattling through the London suburbs. Though the few precedents relevant to the case seemed to prefer this course, the production of the infamous "Green Bag" with its harvest of scandalous report still left a trial in the proper sense of the word very much in the air. Eldon likened the secret committees which were to examine the papers to a grand jury having to decide whether or not a true bill existed,¹ and even if the comparison was a little unfortunate, the inquiry being ex parte and subject to government influence, the fact remained that as soon as parliament took cognizance of the case it could interrupt the preliminaries at a hundred different points. There can be no doubt that the government hoped this would happen. To be sure, the ministers had promised "an end to all Negotiation or Compromise" should the Queen make an appearance, but if parliament ordered a renewed search for an amicable adjustment neither party could afford to stand on its dignity. Whether Queen's men and King's men secretly encouraged such intervention is impossible to say, though in the circumstances more than likely. Certainly on 7 June when Castlereagh moved a secret committee Brougham made an eloquent appeal for further negotiations, Canning endorsed it by refusing to be a party to penal proceedings and as if on cue Wilberforce, the doyen of the country gentlemen, followed by five county members rose to request a two day adjournment.² "I endeavoured to interpose a pause," Wilberforce explained, "during which the two parties might have an opportunity of contemplating coolly the prospect before them,"³

1 Hansard, 2nd ser., i.898.

2 For the debate see ibid., 906-85.

3 Wilberforce, v.55-6.

and if the thunderous applause of the House were anything to go by parliament agreed almost to a man. Gratefully, the government grasped the straw thrown out. Wilberforce's proposal was carried unanimously, while in the Lords at Liverpool's suggestion the first meeting of the secret committee was put off five days.

At the outset the probabilities of success were not inconsiderable. The negotiation at St.Omer was hardly worthy of the name, the Queen had yet to receive a proper explanation of the government's terms since Hutchinson had inadvertently misrepresented them, and an overture on British soil would in itself constitute a major triumph which might induce her to see reason however belatedly. The real difficulty was getting the discussion started. The Queen did not want to make the first move because her strength lay in the government's abhorrence of the ultimate step, and the ministers, feeling that they had already made an offer and seen it rejected, were equally hesitant, afraid to appear too conciliatory. Thus Wilberforce's adjournment was carried on Wednesday evening and no note was exchanged until late on Friday afternoon. After this shaky beginning, however, progress was auspiciously rapid. Anxious to gratify parliament and contradict aspersions of her complete irresponsibility, the Queen announced herself ready to attempt a compromise, the ministers agreed to consider "suggestions" modifying their April memorandum, and each party appointed two plenipotentiaries for the purpose of "unreserved personal discussion."¹ Foreseeably perhaps, at this stage it was the King who became the fly in the ointment. Canning had already grievously offended him by paying the Queen some profuse compliments in the House - "she might be the grace, life, and ornament" of any society, he avowed² - and his colleagues' undisguised eagerness to evade

1 See the correspondence between Brougham and Lord Liverpool, PP, 1820, xii.531-3.

2 Hansard, 2nd ser., i.962.

inquiry after firmly promising the same seemed an unforgivable betrayal and the last straw. No sooner had negotiations with Brougham been resumed than the King secretly sounded the opposition to see if they would do his will. Hutchinson, his brother Lord Denoughmore, Bloomfield and Leach separately approached Tierney, Lansdowne, Buckingham and Holland while George himself saw Wellesley. In every quarter the response was distinctly discouraging. The Whigs were conscious that they needed more than the King's goodwill to succeed, Buckingham called it "complete ruin" if application was made to Holland House, and to come to power pledged to a proceeding when parliament was so obviously against one was totally unrealistic anyway.¹ Once again the King had to be taught a rudimentary lesson of the constitution, that in the formulation of policy ministers responsible to parliament had to have the final word.

Characteristically, his frustration at finding that he could advise but not enforce expressed itself in petulance and petty-mindedness. As soon as Canning's remarks of "unabated esteem and respect" for the Queen came to his knowledge he began pressing Lord Liverpool for an explanation, and when none was forthcoming at a crucial point in the negotiations he bluntly refused to discuss any other subject until the matter was settled.² The crisis which threatened was very real indeed. It was a Saturday and on Monday if the ministers could not report progress or offer anything substantial the Queen might easily throw caution to the winds and parliament resign itself to the inevitable. "The whole question will be out of our hands ... if we have not taken our line and got upon good ground,"

1 Mitchell, pp.144-5; Lord Holland, Further Memoirs of the Whig Party, 1807-21, pp.400-3; George IV, ii.391-3 which according to Mitchell is wrongly dated November 1820.

2 George IV, ii.344.

Lord Liverpool warned the King's private secretary, pleading for an audience on Sunday morning.¹ In vain he remonstrated. Even a further note asserting that Canning's speech "however misrepresented in the Daily Prints, was honourable to himself and substantially useful to Your My. & Your Govt." failed to budge the King, and desperate to resolve the deadlock Castlereagh and the Prime Minister spent most of Sunday afternoon cooling their heels at Carlton House on the off-chance of seeing him. Only towards evening did he simmer down, probably on a promise that Canning would be informed of his displeasure and also because the lukewarmness of the opposition was now fully known.² He was still "much irritated" the next morning, halfheartedly trying to bait Sidmouth into a Cabinet putsch,³ but at least the negotiations with the Queen had been saved just in the nick of time. The ministers denied that any renunciation would be sought, Wellington and Castlereagh prepared to meet Brougham and Denman, and both Houses carried adjournments to the end of the week.

So far so good. It had been the government's fervent prayer that the Queen would see reason and talk, and mainly thanks to Brougham's continuing goodwill this had been achieved. The ground of agreement, of course, was as yet hardly explored. In the negotiation to begin negotiation all that the government stipulated was that the Queen should reside abroad, accompanying this condition with an assurance that "whatever appertains to Her Majesty by law ... must continue to appertain to her so long as it is not abrogated by law." Brougham in reply alleged that "the basis of her recognition as Queen" was admitted, and

1 Ibid.

2 Lord Liverpool to the King, /11 June 1820/, Add. MSS. 38285, ff.218-19; Hobhouse, p.27; Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.22-3.

3 Ibid., p.23; Hobhouse, p.27.

"Her Majesty's dignity and honour being secured" the particulars of residence, patronage and income were "of comparatively little importance."¹ When serious talking began the inadequacy of such a formula was soon perfectly obvious. If the Queen was refused the customary marks of grace and favour, if she voluntarily left part of her prerogative in abeyance, if a sentence of banishment was pronounced against her, the world could not but regard her as a woman in disgrace. Thus to comply with the government's terms became an admission of misconduct, something to which Caroline could never reconcile herself. A deadlock, indeed, portended after the very first conference. Though both parties agreed that "the Queen must not be understood to admit, or the King to retract anything," Brougham and Denman at once asked for "certain steps" to be taken to dispel the inferences which were sure to arise from her self-imposed exile, in other words for a tacit rebuttal of the insinuations already made. They suggested either that her name should be restored to the liturgy or that British representatives abroad should formally introduce her to foreign courts. Each was anathema to the government because it was impossible to ignore the imputation of misconduct whether a charge was laid or not. On the evidence brought before them the ministers had deliberately advised the Crown to show a signal disapprobation and so it would be until the Queen could prove herself innocent. An impasse had been reached and there was no way out of it except the way of dishonour, undoing all they had done, unsaying all they had previously said. In Castlereagh's words, Caroline could be a queen of right, never a queen of grace and favour. Nonetheless, so anxious was the government for an amicable adjustment that the interpretation was strained to the utmost. While the Queen was still refused a palace, she was offered a royal yacht or a

1 PP. 1820, xi.532.

ship of war to take her to Europe, a privilege usually allowed royalty and one which had been denied her a fortnight earlier.¹ Furthermore, without agreeing to her introduction to foreign courts, which was hardly possible when she had none to her husband's, Wellington and Castlereagh did go so far as to propose notice of her legal entitlements to a court of her choice. It was all quite unavailing though. When pressed, Brougham admitted that the liturgy or recognition abroad or some equivalent was a quid pro quo, and both sides having agreed to reach a decision by the following week, a stalemate was the sole reward of parliament's patience. Between a queen wanting vindication, a king wanting condemnation and a government anxious to protect its own consistency there was very little room for manoeuvre.²

One last chance beckoned. If parliament lent its mighty influence to open a way of gracious retreat a compromise could yet be attained, for an address that nothing derogatory attached to acceptance of the government's terms would place the responsibility for any proceeding fairly and squarely on the Queen's shoulders. On the breakdown of direct negotiations that the country gentlemen would favour this sort of judicious blackmail was never in doubt. As Williams-Wynn reported; "... the disposition of the House of Commons, even to compel if necessary attention to its wishes seems to manifest itself more strongly from hour to hour. The language of the Ministerial

1 Regarding the liturgy Lord Grenville could not understand why one "mere mark of ostensible respect should be withheld when others of the same description are yielded up to her" Lord Grenville to Thomas Grenville, /20 June 1820/, Add. MSS. 42853, f.389. The fact of the matter was that mention in the liturgy was an explicit recognition of Caroline as Queen, where a palace, had it been granted, or use of a King's ship were privileges given to royalty generally.

2 See the protocols of the conferences, 15-19 June 1820, PP, 1820, xi.534-9.

Country Gentlemen is that the opening of the bag must be prevented & that terms must be imposed on either of the Parties who refuse to consent to reasonable offers."¹ It was to Wilberforce, the self-appointed guardian of the nation's morals, that everyone looked. He, of course, had been instrumental in securing a breathing space for negotiations immediately after the Queen's arrival, and though he was at odds with the ministers over the liturgy, even sending a personal representation to the King against the omission, he willingly undertook to propose an address which would not only be an acceptable equivalent but also take the Queen at her word when she declared herself ready to submit to parliament "with the gratitude due to the protection she has always received from it."² Acland and Stuart-Wortley, the members for Devonshire and Yorkshire respectively, were his closest collaborators. The extent of the government's connivance is impossible to say, but since the act had to have an essential spontaneity, Williams-Wynn's contention that Wilberforce was the cat's-paw of ministers was undoubtedly an exaggeration which Wilberforce himself indignantly denied.³ The last thing anybody wanted was a head-on legal collision, and the spokesman of moral England was surrounded with good advice from Brougham, ministers of the Crown and the country gentlemen who were his closest political neighbours.⁴ Among government men Canning

1 Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, /10 June 1820/, Coed-y-maen MSS. See also Thomas Grenville to Lord Grenville, 12 June 1820, Grenville MSS.

2 Wilberforce, v.58-9.

3 Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, /20 June 1820/, Coed-y-maen MSS; Hannard, 2nd ser., 1.1312.

4 Wilberforce, v.57-8. It is interesting to note that during this time Castlereagh asked Williams-Wynn to see him and handed him the protocols of the late negotiation just before they were given to parliament. "The evident intention of the communication," Williams-Wynn told his uncle, "indeed almost declared, was to procure a recommendation from the House to the Queen" Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, /19 June 1820/, Coed-y-maen MSS.

was the most forward, understandably so when his remaining in office depended on the outcome. Fully aware that the card was the last up his sleeve, he called on Wilberforce by appointment the same day the negotiators returned to parliament to report failure and won from him what he described "a half-consent." The two days following he also saw him, "from fear of his vacillations."¹ Despite these honest endeavours, it was the knowledge that Brougham's hold over the Queen left much to be desired which made Wilberforce wary of rushing in to no purpose. Indeed, his caution in this direction was amply justified, for no sooner had he announced his motion than the Queen sent "a warm, expostulatory letter - her own obullition" adamant on the point of the liturgy, and on the eve of the debate he and friends had to choose between retiring, putting on as brave a face as possible, or recasting their proposal entirely. Luckily, Brougham and the government refused to give in. The Queen was cajoled into writing a second "more moderate" letter which gave Wilberforce hopes anew, and Castlereagh obligingly arranged a twenty-four hours adjournment though the Lords was becoming huffy at the delay and the King was still waiting for parliament to take his message into "immediate consideration."² The attempt to force a compromise was finally made on 22 June when Wilberforce's address entreating the Queen to yield to "the earnest solicitude of the House of Commons" was carried by 391 votes to 124 at five in the morning. Most of the marathon was taken up less with the merits and demerits of intervention - the result showed overwhelming approval - than the rights and wrongs of exclusion from the liturgy, a contest in which the Whigs for the first time openly took the side of the Queen. There was never any suggestion that the Commons in taking the

1 Canning's diary, 19-21 June 1820 Canning MSS.

2 Wilberforce, v.59.

initiative had embarked on a hopeless errand. After so decisive a division Brougham was supremely confident that the Queen would accede,¹ and certainly, while she could count on the opposition and the fairly general disapprobation of the government's uncompromising attitude on what seemed a point of no consequence, the ministers by resolutely staking their all on exclusion, raising the larger issue of their continuance in office, made a compelling appeal to the instinctive loyalty of every country gentleman.² The people might be on her side: more likely than not parliament would be against. The news, then, that still she spurned conciliation fell like a bombshell. To her enemies it seemed the act of a madwoman, to her admirers a sure sign that Brunswick blood ran thick in her veins. To those who knew her best it was one more episode in a lifetime of unseemliness, another glaring example of her incorrigible perverseness. A trial could not now be more certain.

While fully alive to the dangers and difficulties ahead, the ministers looking back had few regrets. In retrospect, of course, the omission from the liturgy was an unfortunate mistake, but it was easy to be wise after the event when out of the blue reinsertion had become a sine qua non which to concede would be to admit an injustice had been done. As it was, they had been both true to themselves and careful of the King's honour. They had retracted not a jot or tittle of their original allegation, they had painstakingly explored every avenue leading to possible conciliation, and they had placed the Crown on "high and safe grounds" where a proceeding commenced by

1 Ibid., p.65.

2 The ministers held a meeting of official men on 20 June to tell them that they stuck to their original decision and would resign if defeated. At the same time Arbuthnot passed the news on to several of the most prominent country gentlemen. Aspinall, "English Party Organisation in the Early Nineteenth Century," English Historical Review, xli (1926), 394, 395 n.2. Castlereagh explained the government's stand in the House when Wilberforce made his motion. Hansard, 2nd ser., i.1258-9.

the Queen's own invitation. "Upon the whole," Castlereagh wrote, "I do not think matters, up to the present point, could have worked more favourably His Majesty has had all the forbearance without conceding anything; and the mind of Parliament has been gradually brought to settle to the calamity of a public trial of the Queen as an inevitable evil, from which no prudential effort could relieve them."¹ Now that the die was cast it was the prospect of Canning's resignation which was most worrying. Such was his reputation as an intriguer and trickster that not one of his colleagues could be sure of his game. As early as February he had refused to be a party to omission from the liturgy if a proceeding had been in contemplation, and now that a trial was threatened it seemed that he was honour bound to announce his departure. But in arranging matters thus might he not have prepared himself an escape route should the worst come to the worst? And now that he was at odds with the rest of the Cabinet might he not see a quick road to greater power in a carefully contrived act of treachery? Certainly, his going was the last the ministers could afford. With the limited talent of the front bench, to have Canning in opposition championing the Queen would double the government's agony, and it was preferable by far that he stay on even as a spectator still to share the government's fate. As usual though, these suspicions and speculations did him less than justice. After twice jeopardising his career Canning had outlived the ways of a political buccaneer, and to him the Queen's affair was a savage kick of fortune which left him, much to his chagrin, no option but resignation. The reasons which made him unable to act the part of accuser or judge were without doubt strictly personal, probably some past indiscretion or amourette which once revealed would do his career irreparable

1 Alison, iii.122 n.

injury.¹ The excuse he gave to the world was naturally different. He spoke of "his former habits of intimacy," of "the confidence ... reposed in him ... by unreserved communications," as if the memories of a friendship would constantly bewitch him from the path of public duty.² This fooled nobody. Eldon and Liverpool had themselves been Caroline's counsellors in the heyday of the Delicate Investigation, and since Brougham could not be expected to confine his defence to the immediate past they were just as vulnerable. Small wonder, then, that the King convinced himself that Canning had not told all. Indeed, after a man to man talk he interpreted his evasiveness as a near confession of "his former extreme intimacy" and Castlereagh among others was seriously disposed to agree.³ For once the gossips who bartered the tale were not far off the mark. Strange it seemed that Canning could advise the Crown without embarrassment until the Queen had a chance of paying old scores.

With the Queen's arrival in early June Canning had to keep his word and proffer his resignation at least, and this he did with becoming reluctance at a Cabinet meeting on the night of her landing. Almost immediately he received a token of his indispensability, for calling at Fife House the next morning Liverpool begged him most earnestly to consult his closest friends before taking the final, irrevocable step. He was, he said, "strongly impressed with the Conviction that such an Event

1 Canning, of course, was convinced of the public mischief of a proceeding but there is no evidence to suggest that this was the cause of his refusal to be a party. If it had been to have stayed in office and withdrawn from parliament would have completely destroyed his political character regardless of Liverpool's or the King's approval. When he saw the King on 25 June he told him that he "had now put himself completely in the right, and ought not ... to make any further concession" - which hardly suggests any serious disagreement with his colleagues. Canning, p.290.

2 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 30 June 1820, Canning MSS.

3 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.25; Alison, iii.122n.

would be productive of the most serious Evils & Inconveniences ... if it did not lead to the immediate Dissolution of the Govt," a plea which probably had less weight with Canning than the fact that a proceeding was still avertible.¹ Stay he decided he would, for the meantime anyway, though in a fit of spleen a week later he actually tendered his resignation after the King had taken exception to his parliamentary eulogy of Caroline. Fortunately, George appreciated the embarrassment of his position, and having been lectured by the Prime Minister on Canning's indispensability he refused to hear another word until a proceeding was certain.² When that time arrived, with the abject failure of Wilberforce's mediation, there is ample reason to believe that his retention in office was already decided. On his renewing his offer to retire, the King requested a day to think it over since the matter was "full of difficulty," but all that he in fact did was send for Liverpool to convey his commands that he stay on with perfect liberty to take what course he pleased in the contest to come.³ Such an arrangement suited Canning down to the ground. He remained faithful to his pledge of neutrality, he had the King's express permission to act as he did, he could never be accused of deserting his colleagues in an hour of need and his political worth had received frank recognition.⁴ The last was especially gratifying. For four years he had been an exemplary colleague, more than pulling his weight in general debate, labouring without complaint in a minor Cabinet office. But ambition was beginning to demand some reward. His importance plainly acknow-

- 1 Canning's diary, 5-6 June 1820, Canning MSS; Lord Liverpool to the King, /11 June 1820/, Add. MSS. 38285, ff.218-19.
- 2 Canning's diary, 14 June 1820, Canning MSS.
- 3 Canning's diary, 25-26 June 1820, *ibid.*; Canning, pp.290-2.
- 4 On hearing that he had offered his resignation to the King, Bathurst was most anxious to prevent its acceptance. Lord Bathurst to Lord Liverpool, 26 June 1820, Add. MSS. 38285, f.321.

ledged, perhaps he would now have it.

With a settlement short of legal action no longer in question - though the Queen in a melancholy moment did seek a last minute reconciliation through Canning's good offices¹ - the government turned its attention to the procedure which would best minimise the case's inherent difficulties. Needless to say, the precedents were utterly unreliable. The adultery of Sophia Dorothea, George I's consort, had not even a remote relevance because her conviction had been secured under Hanoverian law, and to go back as far as Anne Boleyn was to invoke an example from the bad old days of Tudor England when an all-powerful sovereign simply commanded a feeble parliament to do his royal will. Instead, the ministers had to feel their way through the legal jungle as best they could, accepting the assistance of the law officers whenever necessary. Some sort of legislative proceeding perforce commended itself, partly because the government would have a measure of control throughout, partly because only parliament could strip the Queen of her title and legal rights. Beyond this, however, there were pitfalls galore. Had Bergami, the alleged lover, been a British subject owing allegiance to the British crown Caroline could have been arraigned on a charge of high treason, for her adultery would have been constructed as abetting an offence described in Edward III's Statute of 1351-2.² As it was, her crime was neither a felony nor a misdemeanour, and this ruled out a bill

- 1 Sir Robert Wilson contacted Canning through J.H. Frere and told him the Queen seemed ready to comply with the government's terms. Knowing well the Cabinet's aversion to further delay, Canning advised her to "throw herself frankly upon the generosity of the King." When Sir William Grant asked him to arrange an audience however, he demurred on the grounds that it would compromise his neutrality. Canning's diary, 30 June, 2 July 1820, J.H. Frere to Canning, 1 July /1820/, Canning MSS; Hobhouse, pp.30-1; Brougham, 11.369.
- 2 Opinion of the law officers on the case of the Princess of Wales, 17 January 1820, HO 126/3; Hansard, 2nd ser., 11.17-18, 24.

of attainder as too severe and an impeachment as totally without precedent according to the doctrine that the only impeachable offences were those indictable at common law.¹ The alternatives, the government concluded, were a bill of divorce and a bill of pains and penalties. The first had the insuperable disadvantage that it would relieve the King without relieving the nation. Everyone knew that George's infidelities made a divorce next to impossible in the ordinary course of law, and because parliament was unlikely to make an exception even in his case the ministers were forced to proceed on the presumption that the greater offence was the disparagement of the state and the lesser the dishonour of the husband. Public necessity, in other words, was to come before private wrong. The chief merit of a bill of pains and penalties was that it recognised this principle implicitly. One clause might pronounce a sentence of degradation and deprivation which was the punishment appropriate to the crime in a public view, while a second could order divorce incidentally, or as Lord Liverpool put it, as a "corollary" being "the least important part."² The Cabinet's first instinct was to drop divorce altogether from fear of recrimination and religious objections, but on reflection this seemed pusillanimous and scarcely logical.³ In a case where the state and no one individual was seeking redress the right of the defendant to show the complaining party's conduct did not entitle him to relief was assumed to be inapplicable, and even if it was admitted, and then only in defiance of the maxim that the King can do no wrong, the ministers thought the Crown could claim special treatment inasmuch as every divorce bill was strictly speaking a dispensation of the law in a partic-

1 Ibid., 18, 207. The doctrine was of course debatable.

2 Ibid., 724.

3 Hobhouse, pp. 29-30, 31-2.

ular case. Surely, their argument ran, it was the public interest that a woman in disgrace should not remain the sovereign's wife. Surely, therefore, "a comparison of the claims and respective conduct of the individuals concerned" had no relevance whatever. The question left a-begging was whether parliament would willingly swallow the fiction that no personal relief was involved. After all, degradation might well be a proper pain and penalty if the Queen had offended the state, but divorce on the same grounds still gave an erring husband a freedom he little deserved.¹

When parliament acted in its judicial capacity, either by bill or impeachment, more often than not the proceeding was initiated in the House of Commons, it being generally recognised that its susceptibility to public opinion and its powers of inquiry made it ill-suited to be the court of ultimate decision. This occasion, however, was remarkable for a contrary procedure, one which in great measure looked to the relative position of Commons and Lords in the constitution. In the eighteenth century the Lords was mainly regarded as "an occasionally useful longstop" to throw out legislation which an administration found it impossible or embarrassing to oppose in the Commons,² but increasingly the stratagem was outdated by the politicians' faltering submission to the juggernaut of public opinion. Perhaps the peers' acquiescence in the new state of things was first marked by the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, for in complying with the government's wishes they both ignored the promptings of their conservative conscience and surrendered unconditionally to a powerful lobby of evangelical feeling.

1 Liverpool, 111.104-6. For Canning's argument that a divorce clause would "change the nature of the proceeding from national to personal" see Canning, pp.293-4.

2 Richard Pares, King George III and the Politicians, p.40.

Twenty years later, certainly, the subordination had become a fact of the constitution. The carrying of Catholic emancipation in 1828 and parliamentary reform four years afterwards only confirmed that the people would have their way if a showdown was ever reached.¹ But left relatively powerless as far as the main issues of the day were concerned, the Lords began to map out a new destiny for itself as the repository of legislative wisdom correcting the oversights and errors of a lower house increasingly hounded by the country at large. The Queen's trial, remembering the party squabbles which had distinguished the Commons' attempt to establish the Duke of York's guilt in 1809, was precisely the sort of question which was its forte. Where the Commons because of its numbers and procedural rules could drag out a proceeding interminably, the Lords had legal equipment equal to if not surpassing any other court of justice; a wealth of judicial talent sat on its benches, reference might be had to the judges to settle controversial points of law, and, most important of all, witnesses could be sworn at the bar before their examination by counsel or the House. In letting the bill originate with the peers, the government was in fact being both sagacious and just. In the Commons, just as when the articles of an impeachment were voted, it would have to run the gauntlet of popular impression rather than any serious judicial test, and with the people stout for the Queen and the Whigs manoeuvring for party advantage there was no saying that the House would behave as it ought. The Lords, on the other hand, could be relied on to do the job decently and well. Few men would have demurred when the Prime Minister

1 Towards the end of the Queen's trial Canning was greatly concerned lest the House of Lords destroy its standing in the country by the Commons rejecting the bill of pains and penalties after the peers had passed it. Canning to Huskisson, 22 October 1820, Add. MSS. 38742, f.47.

averred "that if there existed in the world a tribunal whose character for strict justice and rigid impartiality was unimpeached, that tribunal was the House of Lords of this Kingdom."¹ Practised in sitting as a court of law, less partisan by habit and tradition, the peers would send down a verdict of authority which the Commons could not easily discard. Unlike her brother-in-law Caroline at least had the consolation of being tried with dignity.

The decision to bring in a bill of pains and penalties did not quite clear the stage for the major performance. Most of the precedents directed some form of preliminary inquiry to establish the charges, and anxious to observe the conventions as much as possible the ministers had already announced a secret committee for the Commons and actually appointed one in the Lords, suspending its sitting though while negotiations were in progress. Partly, of course, the committees were intended to exhibit parliament as the Queen's accuser, and the difficulty which now arose was the noticeable reluctance of the lower house to cast the first stone. Some members, mainly the opposition, objected to a report from above stairs on the ground that it would have to be hostile to justify the ministers: an impression of guilt would be fixed which would give the prosecution an unfair advantage. Others, from the tenor of the Queen's reply to Wilberforce, understood her to have invited a proceeding, and they argued that the Commons might wash its hands of the affair, for the meantime anyway, and leave the dirty work wholly to the Lords. Impressing everyone, however, was the feeling that the country was inching its way along the brink of a precipice over which at any moment it might plunge to revolution and civil war. Ever since the Queen had arrived there had been mounting public excitement; addresses galore had flowed in from

1 Harvard, 2nd ser., ii.17.

plebeian admirers, the popular press had renewed its expletives against authority in general, and even the troops had displayed the first symptoms of outright disobedience. The last was particularly unnerving, as the prompt removal of an offending regiment showed.¹ Throughout the emergencies of 1817 and 1819 the soldiery had never once been suspect and yet now the King's guards - the cream of the army - were openly drinking the health of the Queen.² Already the crowd was roaming the streets pretty much unmolested - the authorities "wait till the windows are broken when they send for the H. Guards instead of sending for the Glasiers," Thomas Grenville complained³ - and if the troops joined them the Duke of Wellington was not alone in thinking the country was lost.⁴ Little wonder that the government and almost everyone else agreed that in the circumstances the "gravity and decorum" of the Lords was much to be preferred.⁵ Although it meant publicly confessing a change of plan, the Commons was stood easy on 26 June without getting further than an adjourned debate on the King's message of three weeks before. Castlereagh tried gamely to smooth away some of the government's embarrassment by promising a proceeding if the peers did nothing within ten days, but when that time elapsed the bill of course had been introduced and the House could do naught except put off the question until the middle of August. The Lords held the stage from this moment on.

The secret committee under Harrowby's chairmanship

- 1 On 15 June there was a mutiny in the 3rd regiment of Foot Guards which the London crowd did its best to encourage. The next day the troops were ordered to Portsmouth. Hobhouse, pp.25-6; Mrs Arbuthnot, i.23-4; Croker, i.175-6; Courier, 16, 17 June 1820.
- 2 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.26.
- 3 Thomas Grenville to Lord Grenville, 10 June 1820, Grenville MSS.
- 4 Duke of Wellington to Lord Liverpool, 28 June 1820, Add. MSS. 38196, f.92.
- 5 Hobhouse, p.29; Mrs Arbuthnot, i.25.

convened for its first meeting on 28 June. Six days later, in plenty of time to stop any independent initiative in the Commons, it presented its report and a bill of pains and penalties followed almost immediately. In letting the green bag be opened at last the government in effect passed the point of no return, for an inquiry above stairs under the auspices of ministers was bound to make out a convincing prima facie case if only to bear out the insinuations of the King's original message, and once the trial had begun it was but justice to let it reach its own conclusion. Indeed, as it turned out, with Erskine's and Lansdowne's withdrawal, the report was unanimous and worded even stronger than the government thought needful.¹ Having burnt their boats the ministers' great concern was to press forward in haste and be done with the whole distasteful business at the earliest possible moment. Unfortunately this could not be. Before the secret committee began its sittings Brougham and Denman applied at the bar for a postponement of "two short months" in order, so they said, to prepare the Queen's defence but really to frighten parliament out of a proceeding with the full blast of public indignation. Needless to say, the Cabinet gave them scant satisfaction. Briefly the ministers toyed with the idea of an even longer delay, presumably to let the country simmer down, but in the end they decided in favour of a break between the first reading and the hearing of evidence on the second.² After consulting the precedents it was discover-

1 Lord Liverpool to Lord Harrowby, 3 July 1820, Harrowby MSS. 15, f.253; Hobhouse, p.31. After sitting in the committee a day Buckingham was convinced some inquiry was justified, and Lauderdale, another member, described the evidence as "complete and to the last degree disgusting." Lord Buckingham to Thomas Grenville, 29 June 1820, Add. MSS. 41854, ff. 68-70; G.M. Trevelyan, Lord Grey of the Reform Bill, p.194.

2 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.26; Hobhouse, p.30.

ed that the period of grace usually allowed the lawyers was a fortnight, and at first the government had no objections to sticking to this rule. Both sides, however, were constantly seeking the advantage. As soon as the secret committee reported Brougham and Donnan again appeared at the bar, this time to demand that the trial proceed de die in diem without any adjournment whatever. Ostensibly, they used the excuse that an accusation having been laid an immediate reply was essential to counter its impression, though as Lord Liverpool pointed out every accused person suffered the same disadvantage.¹ In actual fact what they were trying to do was force the government to prosecute before it was fully ready. Defence by re-orientation was out of the question as long as parliament preferred the responsible course of ignoring the case as a private injury. Grey himself put the damper on it by declaring that "it would have been equally improper to have allowed Thistlewood to defend himself by saying that his treason was directed against tyrants and oppressors."² It was also impossible to hope to contradict the prosecution in detail point by point because the King's agents had been amassing evidence to sustain their case since the beginning of 1816 and Brougham could hardly have done the necessary detective work in a year let alone a month. The Queen's best chance, her lawyers realised, lay in demolishing the witnesses brought against her. Since many of them would be foreigners, mainly Italians, of low class it was fair to assume that the court would regard them with a jaundiced eye and also that they would be particularly vulnerable to cross-examination, which meant the less prepared they were the better. The ministers, naturally enough, were not unsuspecting of Brougham's

1 Hansard, 2nd ser., 11.209-10.

2 Ibid, 5.

strategy. Possibly his show of confidence unnerved them a little, no doubt just as he intended, for Castlereagh was pressing Vienna for more information about the middle of July,¹ but other than the danger of exposing their witnesses prematurely they had to bear in mind that until August most of the judges were away on circuit and that the peers themselves needed time to settle their affairs before the marathon sitting. The ideal, then, of instant justice proved totally unacceptable in practice. The best the government was able to arrange for itself was a delay of five weeks which the Lords obliged with on 10 July. Typically, Brougham continued to play the gad-fly. Though he had professed himself ready to undertake the Queen's defence at a moment's notice, he now had her petition against the vagueness of the bill's preamble, demanding first a list of witnesses from the Attorney-General as a compensating advantage and then a precise delineation of the charge of "licentious, disgraceful and adulterous intercourse."² Anything which made his client appear the underdog struggling against ministerial omnipotence was fair game.

The Lords adjourned itself until 15 August, two days before the second reading was due to be proposed, on 26 July. The interval, despite processions and a prurient press, passed off much better than the government expected. Among drawing-room society, it was true, there was talk of Caroline being "the D. of Orleans in petticoats" and a second Catherine II,³

1 Alison, iii.122n.

2 By 7 Anne o.21 persons indicted for high treason were allowed a list of witnesses, and Brougham rested his claim on the argument that the Queen's case was roughly equivalent. Motions to secure this point and to let counsel be heard on the other were brought forward by Lord Erskine, but easily defeated.

3 Lord Buckingham to Thomas Grenville, 23 July 1820, Add. MSS. 41854, ff.71-3; Plumer Ward, ii.56.

but in the main, though they were dismayed at the King's chronic unpopularity, the ministers firmly believed the situation was under control. To their way of thinking it was the troops on which the Queen "principally relied," and once Wellington was able to report that the army was sound, "excepting the loose conversation of some in Public Houses," the worst horror thankfully receded.¹ Of more immediate concern was a renewed attempt on the part of the Saints to avert a proceeding regardless of how this would embarrass the government. As soon as direct mediation with the Queen failed Wilberforce declared he "would embrace any creditable way of stopping it," and a few weeks later he began suggesting in private county meetings to place Crown and parliament in a stranglehold of propertied opinion. Forgetting the lateness of the hour which all but made it impracticable, the signal weakness of the plan was the only too palpable fact that the nobility and gentry no longer commanded these sort of assemblies. In the words of William Lamb, himself a leading Whig, at most "other counsels and other feelings would prevail" which made them more likely "to inflame and excite, rather than to tranquillise"² Rebuffed here not to be outdone Wilberforce prepared to strike out in an altogether different direction. His plan this time was the rather naive one of persuading the King to go down to the Lords in person and withdraw the bill for "the gratifying of his people." Oddly enough, it was not a fear of taking too much upon himself which made him draw back but an open letter of Lord John Russell's published in The Times urging him to intervene; in his view such advice coming from "one of the strongest partisans of the

1 Duke of Wellington to Lord Liverpool, 30 July 1820, Add. MSS. 38196, ff.93-4; Wellington Desp. (new series), 1.141; Hobhouse, pp.33-4; Alison, 111.122n.

2 Wilberforce, v.67; The Correspondence of William Wilberforce (ed. Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce), 11.433-5.

opposition" made any move on his part at once seem a contrivance of the Whigs. To return to London, he decided, ready to clutch the first straw that appeared was the only course left open to him, and he moved up from Weymouth accordingly about 12 August.¹ The government had meanwhile watched all these goings-on with the utmost suspicion and dismay. What the Cabinet most feared was an open declaration against the bill by the country gentlemen should Wilberforce feel that his last fling, for under those circumstances neither the Crown which had thought the Queen's conduct worthy of investigation in the first place nor the Lords which had seen fit to prosecute her could retreat unharmed with honour intact. The resignation of the ministers would almost certainly follow because the House of Commons would have shown itself in fundamental disagreement with a policy of their recommendation. The peers, for their part, would have the unenviable alternatives of either surrendering their dignity by obeying a remonstrance issuing from below or pressing on with the bill in the full realisation that it would never pass into law, the monarchy all the while being dragged through the dirt to no purpose. Not surprisingly, in government circles Wilberforce's name was mud, Castlereagh even going so far as to accuse him outright of intriguing political change.² In the last resort, however, there was nothing to fear simply because nothing could be done. The day before the second reading was moved, determined to leave no stone unturned, Wilberforce requested an interview of Lord Liverpool, and though he gave no promise that he would stay quiet when the Commons met, the ministers came away with the distinct impression that bankrupt of ideas he was at last prepared to accept the inevitable.³

1 Wilberforce, v.74-7; The Times, 5 August 1820.

2 Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1.31-2. See also Hobhouse, pp.35-6.

3 Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1.32.

The final test, of course, took place on 21 August when the House reassembled briefly to re-adjourn itself for a further month. A handful of Radicals tried to inaugurate a rebellion by asking the King to prorogue parliament but Wilberforce himself admonished them to silence by describing it "just neither to the Queen nor to the country to leave her majesty in her present condition."¹ The saint had truly laboured and retired to his rest.

With a cordon of troops holding back a milling throng outside - the government reverted to the same security precautions applied during Hastings' impeachment - the Prime Minister moved the order of the day for the second reading on 17 August. Out of a total membership of over 340 and brought there on pain of a fine if no reasonable excuse could be offered for absence, 256 peers attended to hear him, roughly twice as many as the major debate of a session would draw. The last fact was of a prime importance. The peculiar property of a bill of pains and penalties, its endearing quality as far as the government was concerned, was that it required parliament to declare the offence and administer punishment in one and the same act. Thus where an ordinary court of law simply resolved the judicial issue of guilty or not guilty, in this instance Lords and Commons had to tackle a legislative issue besides, whether or not the bill should pass, and here considerations of expediency loomed quite as large as those of justice. No matter what legal expertise the government could command, in other words, the skills the techniques of parliamentary management would be equally important if the prosecution against the Queen was going to succeed. As far as the bill's passage went, despite Grey's grandiose declaration that he would act the judge not the party man, the ministers fully expected the temptations

1 Hansard. 2nd ser., ii.835.

of power and popularity to be too much for the Whigs to sit idly by. And why not? As one of Canning's friends remarked: "If any body says this is factious, they may screen themselves by the example of the present Lord Chancellor, who having kept /the Queen's/ conscience then, keeps her offended husband's conscience now - and all for the public good."¹ Perhaps some government men, along with Thomas Grenville, thought the opposition crossed their Rubicon when Lord John Russell published his letter² but the real test came when the Lords resumed its sitting. Lord Liverpool anticipated that Grey's side of the House would give "all the Trouble they can upon Collateral Points" without trying to change the course of proceeding which the peers were already committed to,³ and sure enough when the Duke of Leinster moved to discharge the order for the second reading only forty thick and thin Whigs responded while Grey and Lord King collected over sixty in support of motions declaring the bill to be unnecessary and inexpedient.⁴ On these grounds the whole of the opposition could safely muster, doubters and devotees alike, whatever the weight of evidence against the Queen, whatever verdict the peers might return. No one included in these minorities voted with the government on either the second or third readings. This put the ministers at a serious disadvantage from the start. While the House of Lords undoubtedly had an established Tory bias, mainly thanks to Pitt's rash of creations, an occasion such as this brought out a considerable

1 Letters of the Earl of Dudley to the Bishop of Llandaff, p.257.

2 Thomas Grenville to Lord Grenville, 8 August 1820, Grenville MSS. Actually, Russell's initiative was much criticised by the "big wigs who think our party ought to stand by, profess no principles, and hazard no opinions." Early Correspondence of Lord John Russell, 1805-40 (ed. Rollo Russell), 1.213.

3 Lord Liverpool to Lord Harrowby, 11 August 1820, Harrowby MSS. 15, ff.251-2.

4 Creovey, 1.308, Hansard, 2nd ser., 11.612, 710-41.

number of peers with no close association with either party, so that instead of having two little knots of regular attenders the situation became somewhat analogous to the Commons where a vast mass of independents filled the hindmost benches. Moreover, in this instance what loyalties there were were weakened by the nature of the case, for divorce was abhorrent to many on religious grounds and in the high and mighty matter of judging the Queen Consort it was singularly inappropriate to make Caroline a political hare to be hallooed after and hunted down by partisans of the King. The Whigs, if they were going to gain anything, could afford to take sides. The ministers dared not appear to. And the more the opposition showed themselves ready to gang up against the bill the more the government had to pander to the instincts and inhibitions of the backwoodsmen.

Quite early on in the proceedings the Cabinet found it necessary to challenge the obvious disquiet of a majority of the House concerning divorce. In his opening address Brougham had strenuously argued that the government was submitting to the sovereign's personal caprice under pretence of a state necessity, refusing to deny himself in these circumstances the right of recrimination, and the Prime Minister after "extensive personal communication" with peers and other persons "acquainted with public opinion" had to admit this feeling was general.¹ The trouble was that parliament was anxious to abide by the rules even where the sovereign was concerned. It had no objections to degrading the Queen because it knew it had an indubitable right to bestow the crown as it pleased, but it had abundant to divorcing her because the bill spoke indefinitely of an "adulterous intercourse," because the husband was not prepared to appear and defend his own purity, and because there was no judgement from an inferior court to support his application.

1 Ibid., 644-8; George IV. 11.361-2.

From the government's point of view divorce was the consequence of degradation inasmuch as a woman in disgrace could not remain the King's wife without disparagement of the Crown's honour and dignity. From almost everyone else's it only followed if more than misconduct could be proved and if the offence was great enough to overlook the notorious infidelity of the husband. To reconcile the two was clearly impossible. Since Liverpool was sure in his own mind that the clause was past saving he decided that the best the government could do was bow out gracefully by getting the King to declare it dispensable and by dropping it at the first opportune moment. Then recrimination would more than likely be scotched, the King would have flatly denied his personal interest in the bill, and the House of Lords would be correspondingly friendlier. Fortunately George, who was enjoying his latest dalliance at his cottage retreat at Windsor, saw the wisdom of keeping his name out of the proceeding as much as possible. In his reply to Lord Liverpool he requested time to think it over and a few days later summoned Wellington, Castlereagh, Sidmouth and him down for an evening when "with no common feelings of regret" he signified his acquiescence. Because the prosecution had only been heard on the case it was impossible at this stage to remove or alter any clause until the bill went into committee, but in the meantime in reply to a pre-arranged question the Prime Minister repeated that divorce was to be regarded as inessential, also assuring the House "that the illustrious individual alluded to had no wish whatever that the bill should operate as a measure of personal relief." This way the King was protected, the government conceded of its own free will and the peers could go on in a far happier frame of mind.¹

1 Ibid., pp.361-3, 366; Hobhouse, pp.36-7; Hansard, 2nd ser., 11.1383-5.

The comparative strength of the forces for and against the bill, of course, was not really tested until a vote was taken upon the second reading. By then, it can safely be said, the Crown lawyers certainly had the better of the legal case. The foreign witnesses, whom Brougham had hoped to terrify into contradiction or silence, went through the ordeal with amazing aplomb, producing between them a remarkably extensive and corroborative testimony of Bergami's promotion from courier to chamberlain, his admittance to the Princess's table, his constant attendance on her person as well as the strange sleeping arrangements that were sometimes made. Under cross-examination only two, admittedly two of the most material, obviously succumbed. As a result Brougham was left in no doubt about his best course. Everything depended on his bringing forward foreigners to contradict the detail and English persons to back them up wherever possible.¹ On both counts he failed miserably. His most important foreign witnesses - Bergami's sister who had lived with Caroline for years and a Swiss servant girl - were found too unreliable to be risked on the stand, and their non-appearance looked enormously suspicious. Worse still, while the English ladies and gentlemen who were called to the bar performed encouragingly well, the two naval officers who had accompanied her on a voyage around the Levant in 1816 both broke down under relentless cross-examination. Lieutenant Flynn who had navigated the by now notorious polacca was shown to have lied on one point which immediately threw the rest of his evidence into doubt; and Lieutenant Howman, a protege of the Queen's, did his patroness even greater harm by reluctantly confessing that during the voyage she had slept with Bergami under a deck awning. Coming when it did, when Brougham had only

1 George IV, ii.361; Liverpool, iii.107; Huskisson to Canning, 14 September 1820, Canning MSS; Lord Liverpool to Huskisson, 29 September 1820, Add. MSS. 38742, f.27.

Italians to call, this last admission made the prosecution's victory almost a certainty, for an impropriety, to call it nothing worse, in one place suggested the same in countless others. For the first time during the trial it really did seem the foreign riff-raff had been speaking the truth when they had mentioned snatched kisses, secret caresses and tumbled bed-clothes. Gifford and Copley's splendid closing perorations gave nothing of this advantage away.

The vote on the second reading, however, was more than a verdict on the legal case. Insofar as a bill of pains and penalties created the crime the peers had to ask themselves not only whether the accused was guilty but also whether it was wise to punish her if she was, and the further the trial proceeded the less expedient the latter seemed. Though the government had nursed great hopes that the prosecution's evidence would sober the Queen's partisans,¹ public opinion refused to be corrected throughout the whole of the proceeding. As Canning clearly saw the question of guilt or innocence was of little or no account to both "the mass of mankind" and "the better sort."² To the first the trial was the climax of the Queen's abominable persecution over the years, the final chapter of a foul conspiracy which underlined the perfidy of the King and authority in general. For them it was enough that she had the same oppressors as they had. "Here," wrote Lord Eldon from the country, "they have settled all matters, because they say, sweepingly, Italians are not to be believed."³ "The better sort," variously described as "the sober minded people," "the respectable part of the middle orders" or "the respectable

1 Lord Bathurst to Lord Liverpool, 8 August 1820, Add. MSS. 38286, ff.365-6; Lord Liverpool to Lord Harrowby, 11 August 1820, Harrowby MSS. 15, ff.251-2.

2 Canning, p.297.

3 Eldon, ii.386.

yeomanry & gentry," took a more purely moral view. In their eyes Caroline was more sinned against than sinning, for however great her "propensity for evil," however badly she had conducted herself, a husband who put away his wife and repeatedly flouted his marriage vows had no cause to complain, especially if it meant an outpouring of filth to shame the country and imperil its morals. The wonder was that the Queen's political misdemeanours, what was believed an unscrupulous flirtation with "the Revolutionists," were not allowed to detract from this cardinal moral issue. Lord Granville rightly assessed the overwhelming feeling as against the King rather than for the Queen,¹ and here it was that Cruikshank's famous caricatures of the middle-aged, pot-bellied debauchee struck a particularly vibrant note. As Williams-Wynn remarked: "the real difficulty arises from the feelings of the People who, perhaps naturally, will not comprehend the wide difference between the situation of the King & Queen & that of any other Husband & Wife."² When a whole nation was moved by them, "honest hatred to hypocrisy - generous resistance to power unjustly used - and sympathy with persecuted innocence"³ were emotions neither lightly disregarded nor easily appeased.

Significantly enough, significant because the assumption was that the Commons would never defy an expression of public feeling this strong, there was increasing talk that the peers should murder the bill of their own accord. If the lower house was going to back down when its turn came, the defeatists argued, there was little point in the Lords making itself a pro-

1 Lord Granville to Canning, 3 September 1820, Canning MSS.
See also Lord Castlereagh to Lord Stewart, 1 September 1820, Castlereagh MSS, xxxvi.355-6.

2 Charles Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 24 October 1820, Coed-y-maen MSS.

3 Letters of the Earl of Dudley, p.264.

meter of discord and target of abuse, and that it would back down went without saying from the reluctance it had displayed at the outset and the numberless opportunities for mischief which its procedure afforded. There the defence might spring a surprise attack on an altogether different front with new witnesses uninhibited by any oath, against which the prosecution could easily be at loss for a reply; at every stage, with no judges to guide the House, questions of evidence or procedure could be exploited to waste precious hours in trivial debate; and the longer the proceeding dragged out, the more acrimonious the discussions became, the greater the pressure of public opinion to be over and done with the whole unsavoury business. By getting rid of the bill immediately, therefore, the Lords would not only save its own skin - Canning was alarmed lest a dangerous gulf opened up between the aristocracy and the people¹ - but also do the country a timely and inestimable service.

In the search for an honourable retreat, Huskisson and Granville, also a close friend of Canning's, led the way, wholly, it must be said, on their own initiative. Both allowed themselves to believe that an address moved by an independent peer justifying the government and condemning the Queen would cover the bill's withdrawal to the satisfaction of all parties if only because a legal acquittal accompanied by a moral lecture and approbation of the prosecution was an everyday occurrence in courts of inferior jurisdiction.² Certainly at first sight the move had much to commend it, for the government would receive a certificate of good conduct which could possibly save it from the full consequences of defeat while the censure pronounced on the Queen would form a sufficient excuse to withhold the several

1 Canning, p.308.

2 Huskisson to Canning, 20 October 1820, Canning MSS. For a draft copy of the address see Add. MSS. 38760, ff.251-2.

marks of grace and favour already refused her. The difficulty was that in the long run such an escape created more problems than it solved. Having begun an inquiry into the Queen's conduct and pursued it assiduously over a period of months, the House of Lords could hardly bring matters to a close by shirking a pronouncement on the evidence, which meant the proceeding had to be carried as far as the second reading at least if not to the voting of the preamble in the committee. Come what may, therefore, the government had to run the risk of outright defeat once before withdrawal was even thinkable. To do otherwise would satisfy nobody. The peers would feel themselves to have been needlessly exploited, the Crown would be left with nothing except a chastening thought of its own incredible folly, and the Queen would be tempted to complete her half success numberless times when opportunity offered in the Commons. "A legal process must have a legal issue," Canning instructed Huskisson. "Else the whole question would be liable, and likely to be entered upon anew, starting only from the ground conceded to the accused, but not resting while an inch of ground remains to be gained to her."¹ With this Liverpool was in substantial agreement. Some of his fellow ministers were inclined to favour a vote on the preamble before the second reading, which besides defying the accepted procedure would, if retirement of the bill followed, fix a moral taint on the Queen while securing her full legal acquittal, but he for his part was determined to "press upon the House that it was their duty, and the necessary consequence of what they had already done, to come to a Result." On 22 October he more or less told Huskisson that the government would persist until a vote could be taken, and the Cabinet actually decided the same the following day.² Granville and the rest of the

¹ Canning, pp.308-10.

² Huskisson to Lord Granville, 23 October 1820, Granville MSS, PRO 30/29; Arbuthnot to Huskisson 24 October 1820/, Add. MSS. 38742, ff.77-8.

"politiques" were forced to resign themselves to the inevitable.¹

As it was, immediately the decision to press on to the second reading was made the less courageous it seemed. The same day Brougham abruptly closed the defence, ostensibly because foreign governments were preventing the procurement of witnesses, but among the peers the impression remained that his ingenuity was exhausted, and the prosecution was careful to appear correspondingly confident by calling back only one witness. Moreover, Donnan's summing-up, apart from the unlucky faux pas at the end - "go and sin no more" - was reckoned "lame," attacking the government as much as the evidence, while the Attorney-General's performance was the talk of the town.² Not surprisingly, the ministers began to predict a fairly sizeable majority. Eldon spoke of one between forty-five and fifty, Wellesley-Pole of fifty at least and others ventured as high as sixty.³ The actual result, then, was immensely disappointing, a staggering blow which encouraged the weaker spirits within the Cabinet to speak up boldly and demand an end once and for all. Of ninety-five votes against the bill, they could point out, over fifty had been cast by an unrepentant opposition and almost forty by backbench supporters of the administration.⁴ Remarkably few admitted the Queen to be "as white as the unsunned Snows," the overwhelming impression in fact being that adultery had been proved,⁵ but this only empha-

1 Lord Ellenborough made an attempt to secure a mezzo termine along the lines Granville and Huskisson had suggested, but after the Cabinet's decision to press forward, further effort in this direction was bound to be fruitless. Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.44; Hobhouse, p.37; Plumer Ward, ii.68.

2 Arbuthnot to Huskisson, /23/, 24, /25/, /27/, /28/ October 1820, Add. MSS. 38742, ff.58-9, 77-9, 81, 99-101, 103-4.

3 Plumer Ward, ii.69, 70, 77.

4 Alison, iii.220n.

5 Arbuthnot to Huskisson, /6 November 1820/, Add. MSS. 38742, ff.117-18; Arbuthnot, p.20. Only eighteen peers signed protests to the effect that adultery had not been proved.

sised that a substantial minority was more concerned with realities than rights. Nor were its numbers likely to dwindle. Many peers had conceivably followed Eldon's advice and simply voted on the legal facts. Hereafter, their duty as judges done, they could justifiably ignore them to save the country and appease public opinion, and the nearer the bill progressed towards the Commons the greater the temptation. When the second reading had been carried by a mere twenty-eight votes only a handful needed to move.

As could be expected, it was the House of Commons ministers in the Cabinet who were most impressed by these considerations and most forward in urging an immediate capitulation. Castlereagh especially dreaded the thought of having the bill his responsibility,¹ and certainly, since no one could imagine it ever passing, to rest content with a general expression of guilt which would excuse the Crown in the future paying the Queen the conventional marks of respect seemed a satisfactory enough conclusion. "She is blasted, & that is sufficient," in Arbuthnot's words.² An equally strong party, however, was staunchly opposed to getting rid of the bill "by any trick."³ These diehards argued, admittedly with greater appreciation of the legal proprieties, that the original allegation having been sustained, the ministers were not only justified in promoting inquiry in the first place but pledged to pursue the consequences until they were manifestly unattainable. To surrender from a position of strength, which was what a majority of twenty-eight could be said to represent, would seriously impair the impression of guilt, betray the course of justice for no apparent reason,

1 Ibid.; Arbuthnot to Huskisson, 15 November 1820/, Add. MSS. 38742, ff.113-14.

2 Arbuthnot, p.20.

3 Ibid.

and doubtless encourage the Queen to follow up her success at the bar of the lower house.¹ Anyway, by persevering just a little longer the peers could pronounce a formal judgement on the case when the preamble came to be voted and the divorce clause could be discarded to render the bill less objectionable at the same time. In the end the bolder spirits prevailed, though not before there was an appeal to numbers which showed how evenly the Cabinet was divided.² A letter from Lord Granville advising withdrawal and reminding them of the Queen's opportunity to recriminate in person before the bill went into committee did not suffice to carry the alternative.³

That the government could make up a lot of lost ground before the vote on the third reading was by no means inconceivable. Had the Queen told her scandalous tales as she at one time intended, had the preamble been altered to satisfy the scruples of the greatest possible number and had divorce been decided purely on the merits of the case the bill might have emerged from the committee both more desirable and eminently more acceptable. In the event rather the contrary happened. For a start, instead of doing some muck-raking of her own the Queen took Brougham's advice and made a show of moderation, contenting herself with a sharply worded remonstrance passed on second-hand. Then the preamble went through unamended and virtually unchallenged, which, though it advertised the prosecution's triumph yet further, was still to nettle some because a

1 Granville was inclined to think that scrapping the bill would redound to the Radicals' advantage, and his views may have been shared by some in the Cabinet. Ideally, he wanted to avoid acknowledging the power of public opinion and an invidious comparison between the Commons responsive to the country and the Lords supposedly more susceptible to the influence of the Crown. Lord Granville to Canning, 13 October, 3 November 1820, Canning MSS.

2 Hobhouse, p.38.

3 Lord Granville to Lord Liverpool, 6 November 1820, Add. MSS. 38288, ff.76-7.

charge of "licentious, disgraceful and adulterous intercourse" in "various places and countries" remained outrageously inexplicit. Worst of all, the divorce clause, the reprobation of the majority notwithstanding, was never jettisoned, mainly thanks to a shameless exhibition of political roughriding by the Whigs. This last setback was fatal to the bill's chances. All along the ministers had sedulously cultivated the notion that divorce in this instance was a state necessity without any success whatever. Regardless of the imaginable danger to the public morals should the Queen be let off scot-free, regardless of the circumstances of rank and position which deepened her crime, the whole nation clung stubbornly to the view that a dissolution of the marriage would be a "letter of Licence" which the King was the last person in the world to deserve.¹ In this connection some words of Canning proved marvellously prophetic. "I wish I may be mistaken," he had told the Prime Minister in July, "but I confess to you my firm and deliberate opinion is, that such a clause, as it changes the whole nature of your proceeding, so will it completely alter the impression which your measure would be otherwise calculated to make on the mind of the public; it will change the nature of the proceeding from national to personal, and it will divert the mind of the public from the moral and political considerations of offence against the State, to a comparison of the claims and respective conduct of the individuals concerned."² The debate which now took place in the Lords was no exception. The government, of course, wanted to drop the clause to save the bill, and had already prepared for this eventuality by declaring it a "collateral" part from the beginning. At the same time though, a moral question inevitably intruded. Originally divorce had been in-

1 Wellington and his Friends (ed. The Duke of Wellington), p.10.

2 Canning, p.293.

cluded because the Crown would demean itself by having an affinity with a proven adulteress, but Lord Liverpool had defended a withdrawal as possible if the religious objections were sufficiently strong.¹ Thus the moment the government prepared to retreat the House could not help embarking on an expose of the King's own conduct, Eldon applying immediately to the episcopal bench for guidance regarding the Scriptural justification for divorce contained in the passage "whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery." Those for the clause argued that Christ's words had never implied that the husband's adultery was an extenuation for the wife's and accordingly that the public necessity of the case should have explicit recognition. Those against either held that matrimony was an inviolable contract in the eyes of God or that George had put away his wife a year after the marriage, divesting himself thereby of his rights under English law and entitled to no more than a legal separation in consequence.² With the bishops divided in their opinion - York and Canterbury on different sides - the lay peers had no certain authority to follow, though the number in favour of retaining the clause probably astonished the government. Not counting the ministers and those peers in regular opposition, all of whom were acting on frankly political motives, roughly sixty ayes confronted forty noes. On this occasion, therefore, the Whigs dished the Tories with rare accomplishment. Determined to murder the bill at all costs Grey unashamedly threw sixty votes in support of divorce and the Cabinet found itself in a minority half the size of the majority.³ "This may

1 Hansard, 2nd ser., ii.1384-5.

2 Ibid., iii.1709-26.

3 The clause was carried 129-62 with three bishops in the majority and ten in the minority. Since Castlereagh (Alison, iii.220n.) calculated that the Whigs rallied 60 votes for the occasion and there were 9 ministers in the House the rest of

so reduce our former Majority as to make it absurd to send the Bill down to us" was Arbuthnot's hopeful comment.¹

The aftermath of this piece of opposition devilry - they "have made the defeating of the whole a complete party question" Castlereagh complained² - made the decision whether to continue harder than ever. Much the same considerations still held good, but now with greater urgency. According to Arbuthnot three-quarters of the Cabinet wanted to keep the bill from the lower house and rest content with the affirmation of guilt gained when the preamble was passed and the report brought up without a division.³ Even those ministers who sat in the House of Lords had no desire to see the peers condemn the Queen and the Commons acquit her, for besides encouraging her to press her claims whenever it suited her in the public mind an invidious distinction would arise between the House shackled by the influence of the Crown and that responsive to popular aspirations and feeling. Lord Liverpool, nevertheless, would not be moved. It was not a sense of obligation to the King which explained his stubbornness: George, hypersensitive to public criticism, was already in a flat spin lest the bill reach the Commons.⁴ Rather it was deliberate calculation, perhaps stiffened by a genuine moral repugnance which Huskisson for one fancied he detected.⁵ As Liverpool saw it, the question of the Queen's

the lay peers divided in the proportion of approximately three to two. Of course this does not mean they were all conscientious votes, but because most who voted in favour of divorce rejoined the government for the third reading it is a fair assumption that the weight of "independent" opinion was against the ministers.

1 Arbuthnot to Huskisson, /8 November 1820/, Add. MSS. 38742, ff.125-6.

2 Alison, iii.220 n.

3 Mrs Arbuthnot, i.52.

4 Ibid., p.51.

5 Huskisson to Canning, 23 October 1820, Canning MSS.

conduct could not be kept from the Commons in any case, firstly because no matter what happened an allowance had to be voted her sooner or later and secondly because the opposition could reopen the subject whenever they chose over the liturgy, the coronation or a demand for a palace. The wisest course was to let parliament settle the business in its own good time, for then the Queen's capacity for making trouble would be severely limited and the government's submission to "the Revolutionists," who had whipped up the popular frenzy, would appear one of weakness rather than fear. The only terms on which he was prepared to concede the bill was if the majority on the third reading was small enough to make defeat in the Commons a foregone conclusion, and after some unpleasant scenes in the Cabinet when he completely lost command of himself these were accepted. As had been usual throughout the trial however, the actual decision was left to him alone.¹

More by good luck than management, since the government to obtain a conscientious vote refused to divulge what had been decided,² the margin on the third reading was just sufficient to justify withdrawal, specifically on the ground that measures of importance were never passed on from either House if the majority was exceedingly small. Significantly enough, it was the retention of the divorce clause which made all the difference. Of the fifteen who crossed the floor or abstained after supporting the government on the second reading twelve had opposed divorce in the committee, and with this assistance the opposition vote rose to 99 and the majority slipped to nine. On these terms only Eldon, as usual apt to see everything through

1 Hobhouse, pp.39-40; Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.52; Arbuthnot to Huskisson, /9 November 1820/, Add. MSS. 38742, f.127. "I walked to the House with Ld. L. & he was not prepared to give it up if the Majority had not come very near to the number of the Cabinet." Same to same, /10 November 1820/, *ibid.*, f.129.

2 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.51, 52.

legal spectacles, disdained to retreat when the Prime Minister gave the word. On the carrying of a motion putting off further consideration of the bill for six months - the polite parliamentary way of disposing of unwanted legislation - the rest of the Cabinet could not have been more pleased. Wellington came back from the House in "high good humour," the nervous Pole remained "in great spirits" throughout an evening of hooligan celebration, and Castlereagh heaved a sigh of relief that he did not have to superintend a measure "in every stage of which questions spring up that shake not only the Administration, but the throne itself to its foundation."¹ Still, the day of rejoicing also had a sober morrow. If the government had come through the Lords unscathed, there was plenty of hard fighting ahead in the Commons. Castlereagh spoke of preparing for "our trial"² and certainly with the Whigs cock-a-heap at their success and fortified by popular applause no one could doubt a full-dress battle for the parliamentary field. Moreover, it was difficult to trust the King. Though George even in this most personal of matters had behaved with his customary propriety, advising but not asserting, consulting but not commanding, his ministers appreciated only too well the temptations which beset him in the agony of defeat. Pathetically conscious of his subjects' dislike, he was not unlikely to try the experiment of "popular rule" to endow his reign, and he could also be expected to nurse a terrible wrath against those who had proffered wrong advice and seen his name dragged through the dirt because of it. Besides, a change arguably had one especial virtue - exactly why is hard to say - insofar as it would replace the provocative boldness of the Whigs with the more diffident opposition of the Tories, thus cooling the party passions which were doing the

1 Eldon, 11.399-400; Plumer Ward, 11.93-4; Alison, 111.220 n.

2 Ibid.

country unaccountable mischief. An end to factious opposition and a return to popular government were mighty birds to kill with an easily thrown stone.

Of course, whether the Whigs could be brought in for a long spell of power depended less on the King than on parliament and the ministers themselves, and here the Queen's trial had remarkably much to say. In the first place, Liverpool's leadership, the fact that he was more than primus inter pares, was reiterated with startling emphasis. Hitherto it may have seemed to outsiders that his position as First Lord of the Treasury gave him an ascendancy during a period of economic stress which his colleagues would otherwise have been little disposed to accord him. Indeed, his personal qualifications for the premiership were seriously lacking in many respects; essentially an unclubbable man, of awkward manners and incredibly highly strung, the apparent sources of his political strength were a reputation for being the soul of integrity, a convincing if not brilliant speaker, and an administrator who had served an apprenticeship in most of the great offices of state. Yet at best this is only half the truth. Liverpool did not merely reign; he ruled. As long as the bill of pains and penalties was before the Lords he alone managed the proceeding in conference with the Attorney-General, and on two occasions at least, when the dropping of the divorce clause and passing the bill to the Commons were discussed, his opinion prevailed against the Cabinet majority. As Wellington was wont to complain, he "never consulted with or spoke to any of them, never wd. listen to any argument or remonstrance & took the most important steps without consulting with them."¹ Partly, it is true, no one cared to resist "this tyrannical & fractious spirit" because if Liverpool went there was no obvious successor. But equally

1 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.45-6. See also Plumer Ward, ii.80 n.

forbidding was the innate toughness of the man, the political fortitude which was to reach its finest expression with Canning's return in 1822 and their partnership in power in the years which followed. Highly intelligent, thoroughly competent, universally respected, Liverpool had qualities his colleagues could not deny whatever his personal failings, qualities moreover which had a particular appeal to those who knew him least. While he remained the party leader the fortress of power was securely held indeed.

One other fact of political life emerged from the Queen's trial, and that was the responsiveness of both Houses to any manifestation of public opinion in its widest sense. Though he made no secret of his disgust, Plumer Ward rightly admitted "that Radicalism had triumphed by the threats and clamour out of doors."¹ For above all, whatever the extent of the Whig's collaboration, the cause of the Queen had been the cause of the common people. A year before parliament had not been half as submissive, preferring coercion to conciliation in the sincerely-held belief that parliamentary reform was the proverbial inch and bloody revolution the inevitable yard. Yet this time, though the danger was acknowledgeably greater with the Throne itself openly derided, the people were allowed their head, the peers hastened to save their popularity and no one pretended for a moment that the Commons would not follow suit. The reaction of the House of Lords was particularly significant. Creevey's comment on the third reading was that "the hereditary aristocracy" had fortunately prevailed over the "Union Peers" and "these villains of the Church," a plain enough insinuation that the influence of the Crown had almost worked its wicked way.² In fact there was no such thing. To be sure, in the

1 Ibid., pp.91-2.

2 Creevey, 1.339.

division on the third reading those lords supposedly most indebted to the Crown - the bishops, representative peers, officers of the household and recent creations and promotions - were found for and against the bill in the proportion of roughly three to two, but when it is considered that two-thirds of those who deserted the government during the proceeding also came from this category Creevey's suggestion of a parade of yes-men is grievously wide of the mark. The truth of the matter was that the peerage as a body made the important distinction between the sovereign's personal wish and what they believed was the Crown's real interest irrespective of where the favours came from; and if the traditional repository of royal influence was prepared to act thus in the face of an unambiguous national sentiment so much more was the Commons. "Every Wednesday," wrote Creevey in the midst of the trial, referring to the processions of Caroline's supporters through London, "the scene which caused such alarm at Manchester is repeated under the very nose of Parliament and all the constituted authorities, and in a tenfold degree more alarming."¹ Never again did a government try coercion. From now on the monarchy, the ministers and parliament had to learn to live with public opinion proper.

1 Ibid., p.332.

THE TASK OF RECOVERY

If some were slow to accept realities the politicians were never among them, for both parties, and the King as well, implicitly recognised the importance of public opinion in the struggle which now loomed. Appropriately, since he had felt its lash more than anyone, the latter betrayed the greatest concern and also the most exaggerated notions of its influence and strength. Even before Liverpool and Sidmouth arrived at Carlton House with news of the bill's withdrawal George had made up his mind that "the Radicals /would/ work double tides to keep treason and tumult afloat" and that the best the government could do was vote the Queen's allowance without further delay. In his view, one which many of his contemporaries would not have disputed, opinion was a commodity manufactured by the press and other "collateral engines" and forced on a gullible people. Being thus, it could not be resisted, only endured; and it followed the shorter the agony the better. Hence his haste to be done with the Queen before the Radicals were properly organised for their "most wicked purposes." The sooner parliament laid the subject to rest the sooner, he was persuaded, the Queen would go, and once that happened "tranquillity" was assured.¹

With this analysis the ministers could not agree less. What the King forgot, and what they could not help remembering, was the increasing reluctance of parliament to isolate itself from the country, so that the stronger the protest of the one the greater the unreliability of the other. That indignation would be strong if the government refused the Queen tangible

1 George IV, 11.377-8.

tokens of her innocence went without saying, and the attempts of the opposition to exploit the situation would only excite it all the more. The point was that public opinion no longer needed to be respectable to succeed, though in this case the dissatisfaction of "the middling classes" was itself too obvious to be ignored. The very fact that "the humbler sort" were heart and soul behind the Queen scared their social betters out of their wits whether they sympathised or not, which meant the ministers were condemned for their impolicy if nothing else and parliament inevitably passed on the rebuke. As far as the lower classes were concerned, to organise was enough to make their presence felt, and for this reason alone the immediate post-war period saw the shape of things to come. The censures on the government later passed at county meetings were as much a testimony to their influence as the addresses carried in pomp and circumstance to Brandenburg House.

Unlike the King, then, the Cabinet feared the outcry against him not for what it said but for what it might achieve. Already there were disturbing reports that Peel's friends were hostile and Canning's as well,¹ and if the politicians' loyalties were crumbling how much more would the country gentlemen's when the opposition commenced their grand assault. Wellington saw only too clearly the danger that beckoned. Besides the obvious difficulties of prolonging a sitting over the Christmas period, especially when the Lords sorely needed a break, the Whigs were sure to bring up the Milan Commission and other "collateral questions connected with the recent inquiries," questions which the government was ill-prepared to resist and parliament more or less obliged to pursue inasmuch as the bill had been postponed for six months and not positively rejected. Thus fresh fuel would be added to the flames, parliament would

1 Croker, i.174; Arbuthnot, p.21; Mrs Arbuthnot, i.52-3.

do its utmost to avoid being scorched and in the end the removal of the ministers might prove the readiest extinguisher.¹ Only a prerogation would enable a discussion of the Queen's concerns without let and hindrance from public opinion because only then would time be given for the hangover of indifference to succeed the inebriation of forthright involvement.

Nonetheless, the King took some convincing. Apprised of his state of mind the Cabinet decided in favour of an immediate prorogation the day after the bill was withdrawn, and Eldon undertook to bring him round at his usual Sunday audience the following morning. But much to Lord Liverpool's consternation he made no impression.² Nor did his colleagues who trooped in regular succession to Carlton House throughout the rest of the week fare any better, Wellington even taking the indiscreet step - for him - of sending a confidential memorandum "that I neither have communicated ... nor will communicate ... to anybody."³ According to Hobhouse, the Home Office under-secretary, it was Sidmouth who eventually broke the King's resistance, but this is almost certainly an exaggeration.⁴ Probably the action of the Queen herself was decisive. On the Monday of the same week (13 November) Keppel-Graven, her chamberlain, made application for a palace and establishment "suited to the rank which she holds in the country,"⁵ and at once the King was warned that she intended to stay and also fight, a

1 Wellington Desp. (new series), 1.150-3. The date of this memorandum is actually 16 November 1820. George IV. ii.380.

2 Arbuthnot, p.21; Hobhouse, p.41.

3 Wellington Desp. (new series), 1.150-3. Arbuthnot saw the King several times, Sidmouth had at least one audience, as did Liverpool and Castlereagh. Mrs Arbuthnot, i.53, Hobhouse, p.41, Courier, 16 November 1820.

4 Hobhouse, p.41.

5 George IV. ii.380. The claim of a palace was resisted on the grounds that the Queen's guilt had been acknowledged by the House of Lords, but at the same time the government offered to assist her in finding a suitable residence. For

warning moreover which became impossible to ignore when Lauderdale reported "that the violent Party in the House of Commons earnestly desire the meeting of Parliament on the 23rd."¹ Convinced that parliament would never do his business as quickly as he wanted, he gave orders for a prorogation first thing on Friday morning (17 November).²

The King's instruction in the importance of public opinion did not end here. The very day that he relented he almost sent a letter of dismissal as well as submission,³ and in the course of the next fortnight he was to learn that he could make an administration much less easily than he could break one. It must be supposed that thoughts of a change had been crossing his mind from the time the government first appeared in difficulties, but only during the trying week which followed the bill's defeat did he give the matter really serious consideration. In this connection Sir William Knighton, one of the King's doctors, was the eminence grise. Among the papers at Windsor there are two memoranda in George's hand obviously written for Knighton's perusal, one on the "Advantages supposed to be gained by a new Govt," the other on "The Evils." In these the arguments for and against a change are clearly stated. As the ministers themselves realised, the greatest temptation facing the King was that the Whigs would form a popular government which would settle with the Queen as quickly as possible and also remove the grievance and disillusionment of the nation in general. "Human nature," he wisely observed, "is ... fond of change, and the difficulties attendant upon our

the rest of the correspondence see Lord Liverpool to R. Keppel Craven, /15 November 1820/, Add. MSS. 38288, f.127, George IV. 11.381-3.

1 Ibid., p.378.

2 Ibid., pp.388-9; Arbuthnot to Huskisson, 17 November /1820/ Add. MSS. 38742, ff.135-6.

3 George IV. 11.380.

domestick policy might perhaps for a time be lessen'd." On the other hand, a new government would mean new measures quite as much as new men, a more liberal foreign policy in the then literal sense of the word, retrenchment carried to excess and attempts to force Catholic emancipation against the Crown's traditional Protestantism. Perhaps even worse, it would drive the King out of politics altogether, for if the Whigs proved impossible and the Tories refused to forgive and forget he could not escape "the horror and inconvenience of being shut out on all sides from any set of men."¹ Probably George never made up his mind one way or the other. After all, as Knighton seems to have pointed out, the first thing to find out was who among the opposition was game to try.

Curiously, because it gave them an importance they little deserved, the Grenvilles were approached before the Whigs, most likely in the belief that such a coalition would keep the Radicals out which was a prime consideration. About Friday, 17 November, Bloomfield had an interview with Buckingham, but the result when reported back to Carlton House left the King "sadly puzzled."² The reason why is not hard to see. No record of the meeting apparently exists but if George had hopes of matching the Grenvilles and Whigs without question Buckingham would have dashed them with an absolute refusal of co-operation. Nothing else could be expected from one who had accused "our Constitutional Whigs" of aiding and abetting "the spirit of Military Revolution which now prevails all over Europe" and who saw an almost sacred duty to save the country from the Radicals.³

1 George IV, 11.390-1.

2 Lord Buckingham to Lord Grenville, 26 November 1820, Grenville MSS; George IV, 11.389.

3 Lord Buckingham to Thomas Grenville, 23 July 1820, Add. MSS. 41854, ff.71-3; same to Charles Williams-Wynn, 5 November 1820, Coed-y-maen MSS.

This rebuff, however, by no means sent the King back to where he started. Everyone knew Buckingham as an underling who could best be managed through his uncle, and furthermore it might yet turn out that the Whigs were able and willing to go it alone. Personal contact with Grey proved out of the question. Immediately inquiries were made as to his whereabouts it was discovered that he had slipped out of Town on 12 November and was on his way home to Howick.¹ Instead, the King consulted his Whig friend Donoughmore for an impression of his party's views and had his worst fears confirmed that they would restore the Queen to the liturgy, make drastic reductions in the army and fulfil their pledge of concessions to the Catholics. Nor was the result any more encouraging when Tierney was approached for information first hand, for he simply referred all inquiries to Grey.² Brought to a dead end all George could do after this was obey Knighton's urgings and apply to Lord Grenville at Dropmore, though it would make public his displeasure with the government and lead to speculation that a change was imminent. The pretence for the meeting, the same used to excuse the overture to Tierney, was to show Grenville as an older statesman papers relating to the Captain Hesse affair in 1813 when Caroline tried unsuccessfully to arrange her daughter's seduction by a young officer dandy.³ Considering that the point could never be satisfactorily proved and that the country would regard the attempt more as an insult to Princess Charlotte's memory than a justification of himself,⁴ the King cannot have been serious in his suggestion of a parliamentary inquiry, rather using it as a cloak to conceal his real purpose. At the

1 George IV. 11.389.

2 Ibid.; Mitchell, pp.143-9.

3 See George IV. 1.515-23.

4 Hobhouse. p.43; Lord Buckingham to Lord Grenville, 26 November 1820, Grenville MSS.

same time his obvious anxiety to avoid discrediting his ministers by openly seeking their removal showed his object was limited to sounding the opposition. What exactly passed at the five hour conference necessarily remains obscure, for the King's lips were sealed and Grenville's version was that he had been summoned to advise as a disinterested party in a great public exigency.¹ Nevertheless, almost certainly Grenville was asked whether he would undertake to form an administration should the government collapse and, equally certain, he declined to commit himself, maintaining that his retirement from active politics was final while disapproving the Whig alliance with the Radicals and the government's gymnastics where the honour and dignity of the Crown was concerned.² The hint here was only too apparent. Indeed, Donoughmore's caution and Tierney's reluctance amounted to precisely the same advice. No government could be formed on the strength of Court favour alone, only on the presumption of an assured majority in the House of Commons which in turn could be reckoned an expression of confidence from the country at large. The Whigs did not palpably have such confidence. Neither did the Grenvilles nor any combination of which they might form the nucleus. Parliament was the great decider, and until the government was brought to its knees there or collapsed meanwhile of its own accord a discussion to settle the succession was of no point whatever. "My sense of duty to Him," wrote Grenville of the King, "must prevent me doing it/ under circumstances in which I know with certainty that my efforts could be of no use to Him."³

1 Buckingham, George IV. 1.80-1.

2 This much can be deduced from Lord Buckingham to Lord Grenville, 26 November 1820, Grenville MSS; Lord Grenville to Charles Williams-Wynn, 27 November 1820, Coed-y-maen MSS; Bathurst, p.490; Buckingham, George IV. 1.80-1.

3 Lord Grenville to Williams-Wynn, 27 November 1820, Coed-y-maen MSS.

As was to be expected, the ministers took a dim view indeed of these rustlings behind the curtain, though Lord Liverpool knew of Grenville's tete-a-tete before it occurred and no one really thought anything serious would come of it.¹ The King, of course, considered he could consult whom he pleased, and to the extent that Leach, Knighton and others were allowed to be his confidants he was right. But with Grenville the case was vastly different both from the point of view of his standing in the world and the government's situation. As Arbuthnot bluntly put it to Sir Benjamin Bloomfield: "the King is breaking down the strength of his Government by sending at this moment for men of great political consequence who do not belong to it."² He may have had the right but he was flouting the conventions nonetheless. Still, this much was hardly worth worrying about. What the government really had to guard against was a situation where the expression of public opinion in the Queen's favour would become strong enough to lead to defeat in parliament when the King could not be stopped from sending for either Grenville or Grey. Already there was plenty afoot to show that this was the game the Whigs intended to play. Indeed, they could storm the Closet no other way. By the beginning of December Grey was heart and soul behind the idea of county meetings, Tierney and Holland were busy giving encouragement and advice from the London end and an address voted by the City's Common Council had set an example for the rest of the nation. If parliament was not going to be overawed by the sheer magnitude of the protest, somehow a counter-opinion had to be organised.

The rudiments of the art of popular government, whether to win power or keep it, are the ability to present a case and

1 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 28 November 1820, Canning MSS; Arbuthnot to Herries, /28 November 1820/, Herries MSS.

2 Bathurst, p.490.

the ability to organise support from the largest possible number. Lord Liverpool's administration could do neither very well, partly because it lacked money, partly because it lacked the necessary inspiration to break with the past. With the press, its main means of educating opinion, it was obviously the former. As one historian has pointed out, the whole of the secret service fund out of which subsidies were paid would hardly have bought a second-class London newspaper.¹ Moreover, the little money that was made available went to papers which supported the government less by interest than inclination, and every Treasury Secretary, whose duty it was to disburse the largesse, had to learn to cope with the occasional spasms of independence which were the inevitable result. The irresolvable problem was that those papers which would have gladly prostituted themselves had no value because they had no circulation, and, conversely, successful papers were profitable enough to do without. "The truth is," Lord Liverpool once said, "they look only to their sale. They make their way like sycophants with the public, by finding out the prejudices and prepossessions of the moment, and then flattering them; and the number of soi-disant Government or Opposition papers abound just as the Government is generally popular or unpopular."² Friendly editors, then, were what the ministers relied on most, and in 1820 in this respect they were able to count themselves fortunate. Both the Courier, which once or twice before had wavered, and the more virulent New Times remained loyal, but of greater service than either was the weekly John Bull established "without aid or patronage" by Theodore Hook in December 1820. Gossipy, at times downright abusive, this paper met the Radicals on their own ground of public house journalism, so much so that by the

1 Aspinall, Politics and the Press, 1780-1850, p.373.

2 Castlereagh, xi.17.

April following it had a circulation of 9,000, "more than any Sunday paper that ever was known." Mrs. Arbuthnot's mixed reaction of approbation and censure summed up its character admirably: "It is a most ably written paper, has done more towards putting down the Queen than anything, but certainly has been wrong in attacking the characters of women."¹ Significant above all else, the achievement was Hook's alone. True, the government made some effort to influence opinion, producing pamphlets under the eye of the law officers, printing and publishing notable speeches in the Lords and recommending articles in the London dailies to friendly provincial editors.² But this by itself could do little to overcome the superiority of "the Old Times and other wicked journals." Newspapers had to be fought with newspapers as Harrison of the Treasury realised when he suggested a weekly or twice weekly "Collectanea" comprising "a judicious selection of the best-written papers which have appeared in the daily journals."³ The very measure of Hook's services was the government's inability to do the like.

If the ministers relied on friends in the press world they also relied on friends in the country, for declarations of support could no more be organised from Whitehall than could a newspaper offensive. Here the government's weakness was simply its unpopularity. To be sure, respectable opinion, "the rational part of the community," continued loyal in the main but at meetings where respectability was overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers this could never find a decent expression, and rather than be outvoted, giving their opponents even great-

- 1 Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1.89. Note also Lord Louth's comment that John Bull was read in all the public houses. Aspinall, Politics and the Press, 1780-1850, p.29.
- 2 Bathurst, p.489.
- 3 George Harrison to Lord Liverpool, 30 November 1820, Add. MSS. 38288, f.221.

er cause for triumph, the Tory gentry were happier staying away. Plumer Ward's strictures on the subject bespoke their feelings exactly:

I told him /Wellesley-Pole/ that as to addresses they had lost all their force, and as a mode of expressing the real public opinion had become even ridiculous. They were carried by force, by the introduction of mobs and people who were not what the titles of the addresses called them; that the majority of people staid at home from fear of turbulence, so that it had now become a contest between meetings usurping a corporate name and the opinions of individuals. We were not bound literally or morally to consider such addresses, under leaders, whether Whigs or Radicals, whose arts and sometimes whose downright falsehoods were well known.¹

Nevertheless, whether one believed it or not, to say that "those meetings in which clamour and confusion prevailed ... did not convey a correct expression of public opinion" was to trot out a platitude which had less and less relevance.² The Whigs knew and the ministers knew that numbers were coming to count for more than respectability, that if the Queen's friends and the government's enemies were allowed to conquer the country unopposed parliament itself would shortly succumb. Harrowby for one admitted as much when he prayed for a quiet recess in order "that parliament, meeting under the influence of no external intimidation, will freely & indifferently exercise its own judgement."³ For the Whigs this meant meetings wherever possible, and before long Brougham was up to his old tricks circularising the boroughs.⁴ For the ministers it meant demonstrations of support elsewhere than on the platform, or rather elsewhere whenever there was there a definite risk of defeat. Of course, their role was necessarily limited. The

1 Plumer Ward, ii.72-3.

2 Lord Liverpool in the House of Lords, 25 January 1821, Hansard, 2nd ser., iv.113.

3 Lord Harrowby to /Thomas Lister/, 14 December 1820, Harrowby MSS. 17, ff.76-9.

4 George IV, ii.400.

persons who could best assess the local situation were obviously those on the spot, and apart from publicising successes in the Gazette and other friendly newspapers there was little the government could do beyond giving advice when advice was asked for. Certainly, there were plenty of alternatives to choose from. A Whig requisition could be met by a counter-requisition of even greater respectability; a "loyal" address could be circulated exclusively among the government's friends; a body like the grand jury could claim to speak on the country's behalf or a signed protest could take the sting out of defeat at a public meeting. The importance of these stratagems to let property have a proper influence cannot be over-estimated. Of the sixteen county meetings which were held, not all with the leave of the sheriff, the government's friends managed to carry only two, and then only because the chairmen showed a notorious partiality for their side.¹ Notwithstanding, by the time parliament reassembled at the end of January the Home Office had acknowledged receiving almost 450 addresses, over 300 of which had been acceptable enough to be printed in weekly instalments in the Gazette.² Virtually every town of any size had sent a declaration of loyalty bewailing the licentiousness of the times, and most of the counties where the Whigs had been successful sooner or later returned counter-addresses. Beyond all manner of doubt it had been demonstrated that public opinion was divided and that if anything the government's following more than made up in respectability whatever it lacked in numbers. With the Queen's popularity on the wane, with the Whigs' good

- 1 At the Cheshire meeting on 11 January 1821 Lord Grosvenor moved an amendment but the sheriff ruled that it could not be put and declared the Tory address carried on a show of hands. Much the same had happened at Shropshire the day before where again the meeting was evenly divided and the sheriff's decision disputed. Courier, 12, 13 January 1821; The Times, 13, 15, 16 January 1821.
- 2 See HD 43/30; London Gazette, 18 November 1820-23 January 1821.

name besmirched by having the Radicals as bedfellows, Harrowby's prayer that parliament would exercise its judgement "freely and indifferently" seemed close to being answered.

However successful this skirmishing in the provinces, it was after all a pitched battle at Westminster which was actually going to decide the government's fate, and quite early on, much earlier than usual, Castlereagh and the Treasury began their recruiting by sending out the customary circular and some private letters where the importance of the individual demanded it. All were much alike, essentially a summary of what the government intended to propose in the forthcoming session and inviting the opinion of the recipient and any friends he cared to consult; the Queen, they were told, was to have a provision "Suitable to Her Rank & Station" with no conditions attached but neither "a Royal Residence" nor mention in the liturgy, her guilt having been irrevocably established in the House of Lords.¹ That the government had guessed the feelings of the country gentlemen aright was shown by the replies. Everyone except Wilberforce agreed - no opinion could be extracted from him - that the nation's moral character required some such reproach as the ministers suggested, at the same time conceding to the Queen full and free possession of her legal rights; and what dissent there was came from those who viewed her allowance as a subsidy for revolution, which matter the Cabinet was quite prepared to leave to parliament's discretion anyway.² Liverpool was sure now that the liturgy question would be less troublesome than he anticipated³ and Arbuthnot's joy was completely undisguised:

1 Castlereagh's circular, 5 December 1820, Sidmouth MSS; Liverpool, 111.111-14.

2 Ibid., pp.114-19.

3 Arbuthnot, p.22.

... the letters from our Chief County Members /he told Herries/ are without exception so stout & so friendly that I defy the Whigs to hurt us. Greatly shall I be mistaken if we don't triumph. For the letters to me & to others come from opposite parts of the Country. The Irish are all right as Grant informs Ld Castlereagh/, Ld Melville hears from Scotland that the Scotch blood is up for us. Adland writes that we deserve to be kicked if we do more than we announce as intended - Admiral Sotheron - Wodehouse - Goech - Wortley - Cartwright - Lord Clive - and several others (for we only wrote to the leading) have expressed themselves breast high with us I do assure you that I never was in so high Spirits during the whole Course of the Proceedings as I am at this present.¹

At last a way beckoned out of the melee which would settle the issue once and for all. In the past it could have been argued that in dispatching the Milan Commission, in omitting the Queen's name from the liturgy the government had taken too much account of the King's sensibilities and too little of the people's.²

Now those mistakes could be conveniently overlooked. No longer was the Queen being refused marks of honour on the ill-fame of common report but on the fact of her adultery as proved by the House of Lords, and there could be no awkwardness in any country gentleman voting with the government and against his former misgivings.³ In stating their terms the ministers planted a banner around which they could only fight or fall, but it was a banner which a majority of the House of Commons still held dear. Predictably, for making party with the Radicals the Whigs were reviled more than their adversaries were for their blunders. Among the country gentlemen an honest conviction that the government was right had joined a deep-rooted instinct that the government was best.

When all was said and done, probably the government's greatest weakness was itself. The common people might observ-

1 Arbuthnot to Herries, /727 December 1820/, Herries MSS.

2 See Stuart-Wortley's letter, Liverpool, 111.114-19.

3 Lord Harrowby to Lord Sandon, 10 January 1821, Harrowby MSS. 59, ff.111-12.

ably be losing interest in the Queen, Arbuthnot might dance with glee everytime he opened his post-bag, and yet it had to be remembered that parliament only helped those ministers who also helped themselves. As Croker said: "though good speeches do not perhaps get many votes, they prevent many shy votes going away a Government cannot go on without the gift of the gab."¹ Any administration which appeared to drift helplessly unable to make effective reply to the broadsides of the opposition could keep no one's confidence. In this respect Canning's return in 1816 had been crucial. Whatever the qualities of Castlereagh's oratory which was pedestrian most of the time and whatever the talent of the up and coming young men, without Canning the government would have been poorly served indeed: Vansittart had no power of general debate, Robinson spoke no more than he had to, Pole ranted rather than argued and Bragge-Bathurst was as ponderous in his language as he was in himself. Almost invariably Castlereagh led off with a speech of solid sense, a few others dutifully delivered their lines and at "the pinching time" Canning arrived with a flurry of words to restore the balance of debate. Plumer Ward's comment, made during the Queen's trial, that while he was away the ministerial bench "seemed like victims" said everything.² When the opposition was preparing a massive parliamentary offensive his resignation was what the government could least afford.

That he did not mean to resign when he arrived back from his Continental sojourn passes without question. The day after his return he went out to Coombe Wood to stay with Liverpool and it was only then that he learnt that his colleagues intended to declare the Queen guilty and act out the consequences

1 Croker, i.184.

2 Plumer Ward, ii.63.

by refusing her a palace and inclusion in the liturgy. This he never had condoned and never would. From the start he had faithfully abided by the principle that the Queen was innocent until proved guilty. The previous February his public reasons for supporting her exclusion from the liturgy were not that she stood accused but that such exclusion would form a necessary part of any amicable arrangement. In October, when he saw the bill against her creeping to inevitable defeat, he was equally insistent that "a public inquiry once instituted, the result must be, if not condemnation, acquittal, and acquittal with all its benefits."¹ To his way of thinking what the government was now trying to do was "act upon the impression of guilt, independently of actual conviction" which had the disastrous disadvantage of being both unjust and unwise. That it was unjust followed from the bill's withdrawal, for a legal acquittal, which was what withdrawal amounted to, entitled the Queen to be treated as innocent. Put another way, inasmuch as parliament had been trying her and not just the peers, only half of the court had delivered its verdict. With this sort of injustice his colleagues were asking for trouble. Because the Commons, by the very act of government, had been deprived of the opportunity of passing judgement on the case, it was there that the assertion of guilt would naturally be challenged, and thus instead of peace and quiet the ministers had obligingly provided the Whigs with a rod for their own chastisement. "It would but have been one gulp more, after withdrawing the Bill," Canning told his wife, "to give to that withdrawal all its legitimate consequences. If they had restored her to the Liturgy in the next Gazette & offered her Hampton Court for a residence, & declared their willingness to propose an Establishment for her on the meeting of Parlt, I will answer for it

1 Canning, pp.274, 305.

that by this time She would have been packing-up for Pesaro. As it is, they have just broken off the thorn at the skin, and left the little point of it rankling in the wound."¹

Here then, on the question of the Queen's continued proscription, he parted company with the rest of the Cabinet. As soon as he learned the decision made in his absence he was convinced the difference was irreconcilable purely because his parliamentary position became altogether untenable. Having once refused to penalise the Queen whilst she was incurring moral censure he could hardly sanction it now; and even worse, the government's decision made it incumbent on him to discuss the question of guilt and innocence which his past intrigue and pledge of neutrality would never allow. Much to his dismay he saw himself as a minister who could serve no one, speechless when his colleagues came under attack and encouraging the onslaught by his very silence; in short, more trouble than he was worth.

Nevertheless, he did not tender his resignation immediately. Three weeks in fact were to pass before his abdication was finally decided, three weeks during which his own strict notions of what was right combated the Prime Minister's reproaches and an unashamed liking for prominence and power. Perhaps more brutally, it was a matter of money and a matter of principle. Because he could not make a show of agreement with the rest of the Cabinet he felt bound to resign, but for him politics was more than an occupation and being out of office was a luxury he could less and less afford. Except for a small sinecure in the Alienation Office and an unreliable income from two trifling estates he had nothing, and in the political world, though no-

1 Canning to Mrs Canning, 28 November 1820, Canning MSS. See also same to same, 21, 24 November 1820, *ibid*; Canning to Lord Liverpool, 14-16 January 1821, Add. MSS. 38193, ff.143-151.

where else, the fact was notorious that ministers left office much poorer than when they came in.¹ Until now, it was true, his wife's fortune had largely financed his career, but with children and old-age to provide for Canning was increasingly loathe to live off this capital. More than anything, it was his pecuniary embarrassment which attracted him to India where he fancied he could clear fifteen thousand a year, endow his family with the proceeds and live happily ever after. From about the end of 1819, impatient to make up the ground lost seven years before, he had been carefully weighing the alternatives of office and oriental retreat, and in January 1820 Liverpool was actually told that promotion and the lead in the House of Commons were the price of his staying on in a new parliament.² As it happened, George III's death a few days later made this ultimatum unenforceable; there was no time to arrange Hastings' recall, Castlereagh's attitude remained unknown and Sidmouth, whose office was designated for Canning, could hardly have been shifted on pure speculation. Throughout the year Canning's position remained uncertain in the extreme. Hastings seemed content to stay on at Calcutta indefinitely and, mindful of Portland's monumental blunder in 1809, Liverpool dared not say a word to Castlereagh of reshuffles and retirement. As Canning soon realised, the best he could do was sit tight until an opportunity arose when he could use the natural influence of his office to secure the Indian succession.³ The alternative was so unlikely as to be not worth bargaining on. Though Lord Liverpool obligingly arranged his retention in office in June and, true to his word, offered Canning first

- 1 See his letter to his wife, /November 1821/, Canning MSS., where he estimates his net income as £1,500 per annum. A note on Canning's financial position throughout his career is to be found in Arthur Aspinall, The Formation of Canning's Ministry, pp.lv-lvii.
- 2 Canning to Mrs Canning, 28 January 1820, Canning MSS.
- 3 Canning to Mrs Canning, 6, 15, 20, February, 6 April 1820, *ibid.*

refusal of the Home Office if Sidmouth quitted,¹ the awkwardness remained that he would still be Castlereagh's lieutenant, the job was not to his taste and his Liverpool friends would be subjected to their fifth contest in eight or nine years. Either way, to leave the Board of Control was to invite "total and permanent exclusion from power." If by some remote chance Castlereagh was removed from the scene letting him take "the full inheritance" or a near equivalent, there could be no guarantee that his erstwhile colleagues would have him back; and when Hastings at last ventured home how could he in an unofficial situation pull the strings to secure his appointment in his stead? On this occasion, it seemed, honour and ambition could never be reconciled. Of two gods Canning had to choose which to serve.

In the dilemma which faced him perhaps Canning's only consolation was the constancy of Liverpool's friendship, for if anyone could shift Hastings or arrange some kind of political comeback like that of 1816 it was him. Needless to say, the prospect of Canning's resignation when the government would be fighting for its life in the Commons filled the Prime Minister with dismay, and it was not long before entreaties to ponder the matter carefully materialised into an invitation down to Walmer for "a long & thorough talk." This took place on 7 December, after Canning and his friend, Charles Ellis, who also happened to be Liverpool's nephew, had spent three days waiting for their nervous host to take the plunge and broach the disagreeable subject.² Even before the *tete-a-tete* Canning had definitely made up his mind that he would withdraw abroad rather than affirm the Queen's guilt by participating in the parliamentary discussions, and the only question therefore on which he was open to conviction was whether or not resignation should

1 Canning, pp.294-5.

2 Canning to Mrs Canning, 1, 7 December 1820, Canning MSS.

accompany his neutral stand.¹ Naturally enough, the Prime Minister thought it quite unnecessary. He indeed came to Walmer with a strong suspicion that Canning was looking "to his private advantage," so sure was he that he was using his personal difficulties as an excuse to "gain a certain degree of popularity as a friend to the Queen & ... turn up in a new Government something higher than a President of the Board of Control."² Of the expected motion on the liturgy, Canning wrote to his wife: "L. hopes it will be the only one - & on that ground has persuaded himself to believe that I might very well take part with the Govt for that once - & there an end. But I cannot & will not, if it were the only motion - for the argument against it can only be sustained by affirming guilt, which I will not do. But further - he is quite mistaken as to the onliness. There will be a dozen field-days - & if I were in the H/ouse/, a Minister, there would be fifty."³ At Walmer Canning at least convinced his chief that his intentions were honourable, that if he did go he went from "the awkwardness of his own situation, personally" and not "from any difference of opinion."⁴ "Absence either abroad or at home is acknowledged to be my course till this sad business is over" was how he summed up a two hour deliberation on the beach. As for his resignation, that was left undecided, for the moment anyway. Liverpool had fond hopes that he might continue a minister in absentia and Canning, anxious to be as accommodating as possible, agreed to hold his hand. No sooner had this been settled, however, than Charles Ellis persuaded his uncle to think again before sounding the King. As Canning was well aware, and no

1 Canning to Mrs Canning, 28 November 1820 *ibid.*

2 Mrs Arbuthnot, 1.55.

3 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 1 December 1820, Canning MSS.

4 Arbuthnot, pp.21-2.

doubt one reason why he brought him along, Ellis could say things he never could or never should, and a few words behind closed doors after the morning beach walk more or less convinced Liverpool that his going was unavoidable.¹ Certainly, on his return to London the Prime Minister told Arbuthnot the matter was virtually out and dried, and Canning came away with the distinct impression that he was "acquiescent" as well.²

Now if never before the full measure of Liverpool's partiality for Canning became plainly apparent. As soon as he realised that he and the Cabinet were in hopeless disagreement, Canning's first concern was to avoid the mistake he had made in 1812 when he had been forced into the wilderness with no prospect of succour except from the mercy of those he had offended. "No purpose," he told Lord Binning, defending his resignation, "is more fixed in my mind than that of not getting again into the difficulties & responsibilities which attended my last retirement from office. I will have no connexion or confederacy. I will bind myself to nobody; & will on no account allow any one to bind themselves avowedly or implicitly to me"³ Lord Titchfield, his wife's brother-in-law, gave him great annoyance by speaking "the language of 1809" - open opposition, the overthrow of the government, "& coming in again with things all my own way."⁴ Convinced that as usual the country gentlemen would come to the government's rescue, he would have none of it.⁵ Indeed, the probability that the Whigs would be beaten off encouraged his going out for then his colleagues would have no cause to complain, and to keep them sweet was the crux of his position. Well before he went to Walmer he determined that his

1 Canning to Mrs Canning, 7, 12 December 1820, Canning MSS.

2 Arbuthnot, p.22; Canning's diary, 7 December 1820, Canning MSS.

3 Canning to Lord Binning, 28 December 1820, *ibid.*

4 Canning to Mrs Canning, 12 December 1820, *ibid.*

5 Canning to Mrs Canning, 1 December 1820, *ibid.*

ostensible reasons for resigning would refer only to the personal difficulties in the way of his staying on, wholly ignoring the difference over policy. Ideally, of course, and he had done it before, he would bring the whole Cabinet round, but there was little chance of that this time when the ministers had already acknowledged the Queen as guilty by refusing her a palace. In these circumstances the less he said the better. Six days before he set off for Walmer he told his wife: "... it is better to say no more of my difference of opinion than may be necessary (& that is already done) to make it plain to the K/ing/ & to my Colleagues: - but to assign it as a ground of separation would be to impose upon myself the duty of maintaining it afterwards in P/arliament/ and that would be an unnecessary, & I am satisfied, a most unwise deviation from the line of neutrality which I adopted & declared in the first instance, & to which I have hitherto strictly adhered."¹ The Prime Minister's great fairness in Canning's eyes was his readiness to assist in this course once resignation had been decided. It was Liverpool himself who suggested a circular letter to his colleagues comprising "a simple statement of motive and declaration of goodwill" and he too who scrutinised the drafts of both this and the communication to the King.² Together the two letters made an apt summary of Canning's position. Lest his fellow ministers should misinterpret his motives as hostile there was a strong reassurance that he acted "solely from a sense of the increased difficulty of his personal position, and of the inconveniences which his continuance in office under that increased difficulty must entail upon his colleagues" Lest they should regard him as a political

1 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 28 November 1820, *ibid.*

2 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 12 December 1820 *ibid.*; Canning, p.315.

misfit who could never be safely readmitted to office there was a neat reminder of their agreement upon "general principles of policy, internal and external."¹ Whether he was believed was something he never knew, probably could never know until his political worth was again put to the test. Sidmouth, who had no reason to love him, replied with a brief note of "extreme regret" but the rest of the Cabinet seemed coldly indifferent, only Wellington mentioning the matter at the last meeting he attended. Castlereagh to all appearances had to be prompted by Arbuthnot into writing an acknowledgment a week after the box had been round.² Still, Canning had no illusions about what he had done. "The Step, therefore, is taken," he wrote, forwarding his letters of resignation to his wife. "It is an unavoidable one: but it is a fearful one - for I take it purely to avoid evil - not in the hope of good. My position in the H of C would have been intolerable: but what will be the result of my moving from it unless total and permanent exclusion from power, I do not know. However my judgment & conscience are alike convinced that I have done right - the rest must follow as it may"³

To fill the vacancy created by Canning's departure the government obviously had to turn to Peel. Of all the up and coming young men no one else could match his administrative capability and experience nor his talent in the House of Commons, though in the latter respect he fell far short of Canning's "glittering" eloquence and the drubbing Brougham had given him over the charities inquiry was still a parliamentary memory. In addition, only he had the beginnings of a political retinue which meant his accession to high office would also cement the

1 See *ibid.*, pp.315-18.

2 *Ibid.*, p.318; Canning to Huskisson, 12 December 1820, Add. MSS. 38742, f.145; Canning to Mrs Canning, 15, 20 December 1820, Canning MSS.

3 Canning to Mrs Canning, 12 December 1820, *ibid.*

allegiance of an impressive body of ministerial supporters, in his case the Irish members and "Protestants" in general. "It is perfectly true," wrote Williams-Wynn, probably speaking for those not Peel's immediate acquaintances, "that his irritability & a certain degree of arrogance which the want of family & connection renders less tolerable, have during the last two years rendered the House (particularly the ministerial men) less favorably disposed to him, but still he combines advantages of general character in the country, of talents & habits of business which altogether place him higher than any other man in the House."¹ Since he was the obvious choice why Liverpool, Wellington and Bathurst went off to Stratfield Saye two days after Canning's resignation remains something of a mystery. Possibly it was an innocent house party - the Bathursts for certain had invited themselves there sometime before.² Possibly Vansittart's offer to exchange the Exchequer for the Board of Control was causing some reflection.³ Possibly the Prime Minister had wind of Peel's disapproval of the government's proceedings and thought had to be given to the alternatives.⁴ It is even conceivable that he did not mean to replace Canning at all but ride out the storm, which to his mind would be brief, with reduced numbers and bring him back immediately. Certainly, when he did make Peel an offer on his return from Stratfield

1 Charles Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 26 December 1820, Coed-y-maen MSS. See also Buckingham, George IV, i.102-3.

2 Bathurst, p.489.

3 Hobhouse, p.45.

4 Canning knew of Peel's reservations, having discussed the subject with him in Paris during the Queen's trial. "He is clearly against the Bill," he wrote in his diary, "& thinks as I do that there is no alternative but acquittal. Surely he cannot take Office, if I should go out." Canning's diary, 31 October 1820, Canning MSS. Whether he told Liverpool this is a moot point.

Saye he never acted like a premier at his wit's end for parliamentary assistance, merely sympathising with him that he could not take an active part on the government's behalf having disagreed with the Queen's original proscription. Sidmouth remained convinced that he might have tried harder, presumably because Peel refused to take "a hostile part" and hinted that office might not be unacceptable in the near future.¹ Moreover, after this first rebuff, Liverpool appeared to show even less enthusiasm for seeking a replacement. No doubt the main explanation for his attitude was that assurances of support had begun to come in from the country gentlemen which made the government's first fears seem greatly exaggerated, and at the same time it must have dawned on every member of the Cabinet that no outsider would take office to defend measures neither of his advice nor responsibility. But there was still a notable reluctance to lock the door on Canning altogether. After Peel had politely demurred, Castlereagh favoured an approach to the Grenvilles short of a definite offer but the Prime Minister countered the suggestion immediately with a proposal that Bragge-Bathurst should take over the India Board on a pro tempore basis in anticipation of a general reshuffle.² As he explained to Bragge-Bathurst, trying to cajole him into acceptance; "... the best course appeared to be to make a temporary Arrangement which would give an opportunity of strengthening the Govt after the Conflict was over, for I need not impress upon you what the Difficulties of the Government will be, if in addition to the Whigs & the Radicals, they are occasionally to be exposed to a cross-fire from Mr. Canning, Mr. Peel, & the

1 Hobhouse, p.45. Accounts of the interview on 18 December 1820 are in Add. MSS. 40304, ff.4-5 and Bathurst, pp.490-1. The version of Peel's memorandum printed in Peel, i.298 contains some slight verbal errors.

2 Bathurst, p.491.

Grenville Connexion." "If the Government is to remain," he went on, "something must be done sooner or later to strengthen it, & it appeared to be inexpedient to put out of our Power so important an Office as that which is now Vacant."¹ Almost certainly, the place he looked to Canning to fill was Sidmouth's which was one step towards the inheritance he had claimed at the beginning of 1820. From time to time the Home Secretary had hazily mentioned his retirement as soon as "a happy change in the internal state of the country" occurred, and to Liverpool probably the Coronation in July 1821 now seemed as good an opportunity as any.² What made it even more desirable to delay matters was his inkling that Castlereagh would not be unwilling to retire to the Lords when his fast-ailing father died and he succeeded to the marquise, for then Canning could be ideally provided for.³ A patch now could allow a complete refit in the space of a few months. Little wonder that Bragge-Bathurst was bullied into compliance despite his pleas that he knew nothing of India, that a temporary President was needless and that the cry for "reform & consolidation" would only be strengthened by having two offices in one minister.⁴

- 1 Lord Liverpool to Charles Bragge-Bathurst, 29 December 1820, Add. MSS. 38288, ff.386-7.
- 2 Sidmouth, iii.353. In March 1820 Liverpool told Canning that Sidmouth might vacate his office after the Coronation in August. Canning to Mrs. Canning, 6 April 1820, Canning MSS. However, in July 1820 the ceremony was postponed for another year.
- 3 Liverpool and Canning discussed this possibility in January 1820. Canning to Mrs. Canning, 28 January 1820, *ibid.* Only a few days after Bragge-Bathurst accepted the India Board there came news that Castlereagh's father had suffered a severe lapse which eventually led to his death in April 1821. Canning to Mrs. Canning, 5 January 1821, *ibid.*; The Times, 9 January 1821. Irish peers could not sit in the Commons for an Irish county or borough.
- 4 For the wrangle over Bragge-Bathurst's appointment see Sidmouth to Bragge-Bathurst, 20 December 1820, Bragge-Bathurst to Sidmouth, 22 December 1820, Sidmouth to Bragge-Bathurst, 25 December 1820, Liverpool to Sidmouth, 25 December 1820,

The loss of Canning and the failure to recruit Peel did little to shake the government's confidence that it would survive the parliamentary ordeal which awaited it. Arbuthnot, who had been particularly gloomy about its chances, was soon reporting that Canning's defection had made "little sensation," and though Croker's claim that the Treasury Bench had "not one man in the house who can speak so as to command attention" had an element of truth, the stout assurances of country gentlemen less and less inhibited by a popular outcry more than made up for this weakness on the floor.¹ One observer saw the coming struggle as a contest between the influence of the Crown aided by "the old tory feeling" and public opinion with "a most decided superiority of parliamentary talent," which was probably a fair enough generalisation.² The Whigs' great weakness was that their public opinion never looked like overawing the House of Commons compelling the ministers to cut and run lest the country gentlemen took fright at what seemed a permanent unpopularity. Eldon, soon after the proceeding in the Lords finished, prophesied that "this thing ... will probably die away like all other nine days' wonders,"³ and so it turned out. Though nearly every town in the kingdom had celebrated the Queen's triumph, though she continued to hold mock court at Brandenburgh House throughout the recess, by the time parliament reassembled Lord Harrowby's prayer that it would meet "under the influence of no external intimidation" seemed close to being answered.⁴ Even before the New Year Arbuthnot found the sub-

Sidmouth to Bragge-Bathurst, 26, 27 December 1820, Bragge-Bathurst to Sidmouth, 28 December 1820, Sidmouth to Bragge-Bathurst, 2 January 1821, Sidmouth MSS; Liverpool to Bragge-Bathurst, 29 December 1820, Add. MSS. 38288, ff.386-8; George IV, 11.400-1.

1 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.56-7, 60; Croker, i.184.

2 Letters of the Earl of Dudley, p.272.

3 Eldon, 11.400.

4 Harrowby to Thomas Lister/, 14 December 1820, Harrowby MSS. 17, ff. 76-9.

ject "become very stale" in the country, noticing a difference after a mere fortnight's absence, and in the City Hobhouse was pleased to note the white cockades disappearing from the streets and hurrahs for the King at the state opening of parliament.¹ In these circumstances, that the country gentlemen would hold stout seemed a foregone conclusion. By consorting with the Radicals, abetting the destruction of the settled order of things, the Whigs had gone far beyond the pale, and since there was little fear of reprisals from the country at large they could expect scant mercy at the hands of the Commons. "When the House sees clearly that the option must be taken between these united powers and us," wrote Harrowby cautiously, "I am inclined to think they will not desert us, even upon a point where they may think we erred."²

This test of continuing confidence soon took place. When the King went down to Westminster in person and mentioned both the Queen's name and "new arrangements" regarding her annuity, it was a sign to the world that the ministers intended no further incrimination and full acknowledgement of her legal position, and once this much was known the opposition's scope was limited to urging conferment of the usual privileges and harking back to the mistakes of the past. On both counts the liturgy question promised to be their theme. The granting of a palace was no dubious royal prerogative: the discretionary authority of the King-in-Council to alter the prayer for the royal family distinctly was. The Milan Commission as an act of ministerial vindictiveness could be explored only by raking through the evidence already heard before the Lords: to make

1 Arbuthnot to Lord Liverpool, 26 December 1820, Add. MSS. 38574, f.233; Hobhouse, p.47 and n.2.

2 Lord Harrowby to Lord Sandon, 10 January 1821, Harrowby MSS. 59, ff.111-12.

the omission from the liturgy appear the root cause of present discontents there was no need to go beyond the failure of the negotiations in June. Even the ministers helped shape the strategy of their opponents. By letting it be known from the moment parliament was prorogued that they would stand or fall on this one question, they encouraged the Whigs, and indeed everyone, to look here for the culmination of the struggle. What Brougham twelve months before had dismissed as a "trifle light as air" now became an issue which would make or break the government. Wholly in keeping with this state of affairs, the first day of the session the opposition shunned an amendment on the Address, Lord Archibald Hamilton gave notice of a motion on the subject and a dissident Tory lawyer moved for the relevant papers.

Up to the first real trial of strength nothing occurred to upset the portents of success, which government men interpreted rather moderately in terms of a seventy or eighty majority.¹ Before the Speech had even been read Castlereagh was forced to oppose the production of papers on procedural grounds, and the discussion and division which ensued were said to have shown straight away that the government would survive, if only because the Whigs had again fallen out among themselves.² In succeeding days this impression was confirmed to a point where complete exculpation became scarcely matter of doubt. By declaring that the Queen's conduct was a closed book, by refusing all inquiry into the Milan Commission for the very reason that it would reopen it, Castlereagh immediately removed apprehensions that the ministers would attempt self-justification at the

1 Buckingham, George IV, i.112; Broughton, Recollections of a Long Life, ii.140; Charles Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 23 January 1821, Coed-y-maen MSS.

2 Buckingham, George IV, i.111-12. The motion by Wetherell, whom Tierney described as "a uniform supporter of ministers," was defeated 260-169.

nation's expense,¹ and more and more the country gentlemen realised that the greater the government's triumph the sooner the Whigs would refrain from raking the dying fire. In this connection, a speech on the second day by Heygate, a London alderman, was particularly heartening. Himself an independent supporter of the ministry who had grave reservations about the omission from the liturgy and subsequent events, he welcomed the news that there would be no further action against the Queen, looked forward to the time when "the permanent and great interests of the country would occupy the attention of parliament," and strongly reprobated Caroline's conduct during and since her trial as worthy of continued proscription.² Not surprisingly, the cheers from the ministerial benches which greeted these remarks led the government to assume that these views were the views of the rest of his kind. There were plenty of reports, certainly, that they had left the opposition much "disconcerted." Already "the Mountain," as the Radical part was called, had been at odds with the leadership over an amendment to the Speech, and Lord Archibald Hamilton's motion for naming the Queen in the liturgy, tabled the first day in defiance of the party's decision, showed that much bad blood still remained. By making it clear that the House would never support Hamilton, Heygate's speech only led to new recriminations. While a hastily summoned meeting at Burlington House agreed to attack the original omission instead, the rebels again refused to give way to the motion of no confidence which the party intended, and the result was that a mild and somewhat irrelevant censure that the Order-in-Council had been "ill-advised and inexpedient" became the opening move of the opposition's offensive. As the government quickly realised, this put the

1 Hangard, 2nd ser., iv.67, 68, 69, 76-7, 77-8.

2 Ibid., 82-5, 88-90.

Whigs on weak ground from the start. When Wilberforce had sought the mediation of the House the previous June a similar proposition had been overwhelmingly defeated, and to try afresh after all the bold talk and petitions galore in favour of the Queen's reinsertion seemed a pathetic attempt to catch votes and eat words. The description which the ministers thought most apt was "milk and water." Not only did the motion rehash a question already decided and superseded by events, but it also led to no practical result, for to condemn the government on "an insulated point in the whole mass of misconduct" could secure neither the Queen's innocence nor new advisers for the Crown. "There are two notices before the House," ran Lord Harrowby's brief of the situation, "one for an address to reinstate the Q. in the liturgy, the other for a direct censure upon the whole conduct of government respecting the Q. Why therefore decide separately an abstract question The decision, both as it respects the Q. & as it respects the government, can be pronounced by the House much more fairly, fully & effectively upon either of these"¹

Of course, the essence of the Whig plan, making the best of a bad job, was to attract sufficient votes on the least offensive motion to begin a momentum which would carry both the general censure and the Queen's restoration to the liturgy. Where it failed was the unswerving distrust of the country gentlemen for the Whigs as the guileless tools of Radical revolution, political undesirables who had sought power too eagerly, joined in an unholy alliance and dragged the country on a rack of popular commotion. For Hamilton's motion Castle-

1 Lord Harrowby to Lord Sandon, 26 January /1821/, Harrowby MSS. 59, ff.48-9. See also Huskisson to Canning, 30 January 1821, Canning MSS; Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.65-6; Hobhouse, p.48.

reagh made no avowal that the government would stand or fall by the result, but it would have made little difference if he had. Disgusted on the one hand by the marriage of convenience between Whigs and Radicals, convinced on the other that the ministers would play the Queen fair, the great mass of unattached members refused to give the opposition any success however cheap. On Robinson's motion of adjournment, which technically evaded the issue of censure, the government collected 310 votes to their opponents' 209; and this at half past six in the morning after the lawyers had exhausted their part of the subject and the rest of the House in the process.¹ Huskisson, who all along had been sceptical of the government's chances,² was astounded at the outcome. "I did not make sufficient allowance for the dread of the Whigs among the Country Gentlemen," he explained to Canning. "Their alarm has been much increased by the recent conduct of the Whigs at County Meetings; whilst, on the other hand, the tone of the Speech, the declaration that nothing further was or had been in contemplation agst the Q. and that after making a liberal provision for Her the question would be for ever at rest, as far as the Ministers were concerned, has greatly conciliated our Friends."³ Granted, the Whigs had some comfort that the minority was their largest vote since the defeat of the property tax, but at the same time the government had anticipated desertions from among the "weak-hearted" and of

- 1 For accounts of the debate see Huskisson to Canning, 30 January 1821, Canning MSS; George IV, ii.406-9; Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.66.
- 2 Huskisson to Canning, 17 December 1820, Add. MSS. 38742, ff.156-8.
- 3 Huskisson to Canning, 30 January 1821, Canning MSS. See also J.W. Ward's comment in Letters of the Earl of Dudley, p.275: "I regard the majority as a majority against the Foxites, rather than as an expression of an opinion upon the particular question. And in that view the House of Commons is perhaps not so unfaithful a representative of the public will as some persons pretend."

the thirty who crossed the floor Castlereagh expected fully twenty to return.¹ He knew, as everyone knew, that the omission from the liturgy had been the weakest part of the ministers' case, if only because the motions to come placed the question of confidence fairly and squarely before the country gentlemen. The next time round there would be no opportunity for nice distinctions. "This division will probably decide the fate of the Session," said Hobhouse of the government's success,² and the surmise was perfectly right.

The Whigs for their part were quite aware that they had shot their bolt, and if Mrs. Arbuthnot is to be believed their fury was commensurate. Some of the wilder spirits, including the Duke of Bedford, wanted "to give up all further efforts in the House and make their way out of doors," hoping to bludgeon parliament into submission by the sheer weight of public opinion. The more timid members preferred "the good old plan of making speeches and motions" to keep the government under constant pressure, though even they were tempted by the daring and probably illegal project of raising a subscription for the Queen by public appeal.³ In the end the whole party came to accept a parliamentary course. No move was made to withdraw the motion of general censure which Hamilton had obstinately forestalled, and notice of another to restore the Queen to the liturgy, the logical conclusion of all the Whigs' efforts, was given shortly after the House resumed. Both, of course, were in effect motions of no confidence, and in pushing them now the party could only appear faithful to its principles and game losers. In the words of one member, to out-argue the

1 George IV, ii.406.

2 Hobhouse, p.48.

3 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.66, 67-8; Huskisson to Canning, 30 January 1821, Canning MSS.

government and yet be outvoted was their fate for the session.¹ However regrettable the proceeding against the Queen, however tempting it was to concede once and settle all, the country gentlemen refused to have truck with the Whigs and that was that. Bankes spoke for the great majority of them when he sketchily explored the political dichotomy. There was "a dangerous faction," he warned the House, "endeavouring to extend itself by all the means it could command, and catching hold of every principle of ruin, by which it might succeed in involving the Kingdom in a general conflagration." Not only had the Whigs given it "vastly too great a countenance" by organising and attending meetings in concert, but they had pledged themselves to the repeal of the Six Acts, parliamentary reform and Catholic relief, in short "a complete change of the system of government" which would surely open the floodgates of revolution. By way of comparison their adversaries united safe principles with "great talents," "a large share of practical knowledge" and "a coincidence of public opinion," and if that was not enough "under their auspices a most brilliant war had been put an end to by a peace more glorious than any which the country had enjoyed for four centuries." Past and present then, Bankes insinuated, the Whigs had failed the nation.² A ministerial majority of 146 on the motion of censure followed by one of 120 on the liturgy showed that his fellows fully agreed.

These two drubbings, the last of which occurred in only the third week of the session, finally laid the subject to rest. The inquiry into the Milan Commission, which for months the opposition had been threatening, was quietly dropped, and though some country gentlemen objected to the amount of the

1 Letters of the Earl of Dudley, pp.274-5.

2 Hansard, 2nd ser., iv.392-4.

annuity, the money was quickly forthcoming once it was realised that nothing was better calculated to drive the Queen into a suitable obscurity. Nor was the government any less circumspect; soon after the triumph in parliament the Treasury requested friendly editors to let her alone and Sidmouth quickly quashed the latest notion of the King that divorce was yet possible.¹ Except for threats to gatecrash a Carlton House levee and the Coronation itself, the latter which she actually had the temerity to attempt, Caroline was no longer a nuisance much less a serious menace. Radicals and Whigs alike put her aside as a forgotten plaything. On the last day of the session with the Black Rod knocking on the door Hume tried to get the House to address the Crown on her right of coronation, but that was the last parliament heard of her. A month later she had been hurried into the even greater obscurity of the grave.

Meanwhile the ministers did not rest on their laurels. Not that they could afford to do much else. The whole episode of the Queen served to emphasise parliament's vulnerability to any forthright expression of public feeling and with a general discontentment still pervading the nation a policy of cautious improvement continued to commend itself. Sound government, of course, had come to mean economical government above all. By the beginning of March Vansittart was able to promise a reduction of well over £1,000,000 on the estimates and in the end a saving of £1,650,000 was claimed, leaving the total considerably below the figure set by the finance committee three years before.² Strictly speaking, it is true, comparison should have been made with 1819, for the army had had to be substantially increased

1 Huskisson to Canning, 20 February 1821, Canning MSS; Hobhouse, p.48.

2 Hangard, 2nd ser., iv.1112-13, v.1074. The finance committee in 1818 estimated the army, navy, ordinance and miscellaneous services to cost £18,672,000. Vansittart's budget in 1821 put them at £18,021,800.

during "the state of emergency."¹ Even so, the country gentlemen remained agreeably surprised. From then Hume and the rest of the "economical monomaniacs" received no comfort whatever; a running fire kept up in the committee of supply left the ministers completely unscathed and a final barrage in the shape of an address to the throne pledging the Crown to economy made far more noise than damage. Throughout the whole post-war period it is quite plain the government never forgot the basic lesson of political survival.

Progress towards the rationalisation of the commercial system was equally auspicious. In 1820 the House of Commons committee on foreign trade had produced a comprehensive report on the navigation laws which is perhaps best described as a statement of general intent. Hardly one practical recommendation was contained in it, but the harsh strictures on the "vast and confused mass of legislation" which made up "a policy of useless severity" and the highly idealistic flourish at the end that commerce ought to be "a source of reciprocal amity between nations, and an interchange of productions to promote the industry, the wealth and happiness of mankind" showed clearly along what lines, though with "the utmost circumspection and caution," the government intended to advance.² Thanks to the Queen's trial, for the time being nothing further could be done. Nevertheless, the ministers did not wait any longer than they had to. Early in February 1821 Wallace, the Vice-President of the Board of Trade, asked the House of Commons to reappoint a select committee, and the Lords followed suit a week or so later. Between them these two committees produced five reports on the

1 According to a memorandum in Add. MSS. 48436, pp.114-16 the British and Irish establishments were increased by 11,950 in 1820. The difference between the total estimates of 1819 and 1821 was less than £500,000.

2 PP, 1820, ii.365-503.

timber trade, East India shipping regulations and silk and wine imports, paving the way for legislative redress as soon as parliamentary time became available.¹ Though towards the end of the session Wallace gave notice of a general revision of the navigation system, it so turned out that a bill reducing the preference enjoyed by Canadian timber was the sum of the government's achievement. Still, even this much was significant. The opposition from colonial and shipping interests made the going none too easy, and the Board of Trade's perseverance in spite of it made good Wallace's boast that the government had taken up the subject neither grudgingly nor against its better judgement.² One blow had been successfully aimed at the venerable edifice of mercantilist tradition, and the way was set for its complete demolition.

In contrast, concerning legal reform the ministers appeared indolent if not downright obstructive. In 1819 Mackintosh's committee on the criminal law had tabled a report recommending three major improvements; the repeal or amendment of capital statutes now obsolete, the abolition of the death penalty in certain cases of larceny and a considerable mitigation of the punishments for forgery.³ Attempts to implement these during the following two years however, met with very little success. Indeed, to the reformers it must have seemed that the government represented the essence of the reactionary spirit against which they were contending. Mainly at Eldon's instigation, many obsolete offences were saved from extinction, and the two bills dealing with these anachronisms passed into law very severely mutilated. When the law officers threatened opposition to Mackintosh's larceny bills, two had to be withdrawn and the

1 Ibid., 1821, vi.1-433; LJ, lii.189-320, 472-503.

2 Bancard, 2nd ser., iv.425.

3 PR, 1819, viii.1-273.

third was allowed through with the death penalty still intact. Finally, and perhaps worst of all, the forgery bill was done to death at Castlereagh's orders after its supporters had conducted it past the third reading and believed it safe to the Lords. Of course, the ministers were not really the ogres of reaction which some imagined. Admittedly, as long as Sidmouth remained the Home Office was unlikely to step far outside its administrative routine whatever its preoccupation with the problem of order, for after years behind a Whitehall desk he was a conservative by habit as much as by instinct. On the other hand, something was done and even if it was very little there were plenty of extenuating circumstances. The most obvious was that the Home Office was simply overworked. Sidmouth may have been hidebound by the tradition of his department but throughout a year and a half of unrest his under-secretaries and a handful of clerks were kept fully occupied operating the machinery of order which was after all their first and foremost function. Nor did he have much respite supervising their work. "This is my second week day at Richmond Park since the 12th of August," he complained to Bragge-Bathurst in the middle of December.¹ True, with things in this state it is arguable that the ministers should have helped, not hindered Mackintosh. Apart from a natural dislike that the opposition should have the initiative on such an important question, the difficulty here was that they firmly believed the Whigs were tackling reform from altogether the wrong angle. Ever since statistical returns of the prison population had become available the government had taken the view that until the apparatus of

1 Sidmouth, iii.338. On his retirement Sidmouth complained that "the whole strength of the establishment has been insufficient to carry on the current business of the office." Cash, p.298.

secondary punishment was given a thorough overhaul there was little point in reducing the hanging deterrent. Too great a leniency, they argued, would only exacerbate what was already a serious social problem. The more the criminal could offend without his life becoming forfeit the more he would offend, and as long as the prison system encouraged him in these ways any deterrent would completely disappear. Compared with the Whig reformers it was the safer, administrative approach, and though as an issue prison reform inspired less interest and less emotion than capital punishment the ministers stuck faithfully to their relatively thankless task. While the committee appointed in 1819 "to inquire into the State and Description of Gaols" made few practical suggestions, the evidence it collected from a number of expert witnesses provided the groundwork for a reforming and consolidating bill introduced the following session.¹ As it happened, this was purely a reminder that the government had the matter in hand, for the Queen's trial prevented any progress beyond the first reading. The next session, however, everything went smoothly. A select committee with a fair sprinkling of reformers was again appointed, the discarded bill was reintroduced for their comment and the way was set for "the first measure of general prison reform to be framed and enacted on the responsibility of the national executive."² Only in 1823 did the bill finally become law, but it is enough to show that the Whigs' share of glory was more than they deserved. Behind the scenes in the committee rooms the government was quietly working out its own brand of penological improvement.

Whatever their importance in the long term, as issues in the parliamentary context commercial and legal reform were,

¹ PP, 1819, vii.1-560.

² Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Prisons under Local Government, p.73.

comparatively speaking, fairly innocuous. Both tended to be the preserves of specialists or enthusiasts where other subjects, say agricultural distress and parliamentary reform, were the general concern of every member. Certainly, in the 1821 session the latter two, always forgetting the annual or near annual scrimmage over Catholic emancipation, aroused the greatest passions and constantly obtruded into other business. That there would be trouble from the country gentlemen over the state of agriculture was a foregone conclusion. In 1820 an exceptionally good harvest again demonstrated that the farmer had ample protection against a glut of foreign-grown corn but none against his own over-production, and as prices plummeted in anticipation of an excess supply yet another fresh of petitions inevitably began. Initially, the ministers tried to turn the wrath from their door by carrying into effect the one substantive recommendation of the previous year's committee. The mode of calculating the price which determined the opening and closing of the ports by taking the averages of twelve specially defined maritime districts had always caused complaints that unscrupulous middlemen could exploit it to their own advantage, and a bill changing the units to a hundred or so towns was the obvious answer. But this slight amendment was not nearly enough to satisfy impatient and irate country gentlemen who saw the whole system at fault, and taxation and the gold standard as well. When Gooch, the member for Suffolk, moved to refer the petitions to a select committee, the government did not demur but only pointed out that "the country should understand that there did not exist any reasonable expectation of being able to provide a remedy for evils which were dependent on causes beyond the control of the legislature."¹ Fortunately, after a tough struggle which had Huskisson roundly cursing his

1 Hansard, 2nd ser., iv.361, 1139-61.

fellow members, the committee came to the same conclusion and the corn laws were saved for yet another year.¹ Even then the ministers did not quite get off scot-free. While the inquiry was in progress the repeal of "an unjust and oppressive" tax on farm horses was secured by a joyous coalition of Whigs and agriculturists, and the additional duties on malt imposed in 1819 almost met a similar fate despite Castlereagh's pleas that the sinking fund would be surely shot to pieces.

For ministers, disgruntled agriculturists had become an established occupational hazard. Much of the opposition during the session was in fact customary grouch or, to draw a fine distinction, predictable noise: the "economical monomaniacs" appeared in force as usual, the squirearchy hallooed in hot pursuit of agricultural relief, the shipping interest cried before it was hurt, and the legal reformers continued to see the scaffold and nothing beyond. But the most remarkable, and for the ministers the most worrying development was the country gentlemen's seeming inclination for a "temperate" reform of the representation. Though motions by Lambton and Lord John Russell on the general principle were defeated, they were by no means the resounding victories of previous years when Burdett and company were hounded by majorities of a hundred or hundred and fifty, and suspicions naturally arose that the independents like many of the Whigs were having serious second thoughts. What really gave these fears substance was their attitude towards the disfranchisement of Grampound, a rotten borough which had been proved corrupt in 1818-19 by the conviction of Sir

1 Charles Ellis to Canning, 29 May 1821, Canning MSS; PP, 1821, ix.1-479. According to Huskisson's own statement in the House of Commons on 18 February 1822 (Hansard, 2nd ser., vi.506) he had presented a series of resolutions to the committee and drawn up a report founded on them. But his draft had been discussed paragraph by paragraph "and many alterations were made in the propriety of which he did not concur," alterations affecting "not only the wording but the principle"

Manasseh Lopes and several electors for bribery and the Commons' own inquiry. There was no difference of opinion over what penalty was appropriate, for the House had decided that on similar cases in the past. Rather it concerned what place should be enfranchised, again the usual practice, in Grampound's stead. Hitherto, the offending borough had been invariably thrown into the adjoining hundred, but in this instance the hundred already contained four other parliamentary boroughs which with the county would give some freeholders an excessive electoral privilege. The reforming party led by Lord John Russell wanted Leeds to reap the advantage, others preferred Yorkshire, and the government had to make up its mind which was the lesser evil, all the while strenuously contending that the remedy was peculiar and that no principle of representation by population was involved or recognised. The disconcerting feature was that the country gentlemen appeared to come round in favour of Leeds despite ministerial protests that as in Westminster "it would subject the population to a perpetual factious canvass ... and keep alive a permanent spirit of turbulence and disaffection amongst them."¹ In December 1819 when Lord John Russell tried to establish the principle that towns like Leeds ought to be represented, Castlereagh meekly put him off by suggesting that where Grampound was concerned the House should only consider the merits of the particular case. The following year a bill was brought in tacitly stating the reformers' proposition, and his attitude hardened into a distinct preference for enfranchising the hundred. The Queen's trial prevented parliament from reaching any definite conclusion, but enough was done to show that a strong party was emerging among the county members in opposition to the government's plan. This

1 See Lord Liverpool's memorandum on the subject, Liverpool, 111.137-9.

became obvious with the reintroduction of the bill in February 1821. A proposal to save the seat for Cornwall was negatived without a division, the second best alternative of adding to Yorkshire's county representation was defeated by sixty votes and Stuart Wortley who had displaced Lord John Russell as the bill's guardian angel triumphantly secured the insertion of Leeds. According to Huskisson, the Prime Minister was struck with dismay. He saw the whole question launched "into the sea of speculation" by "the idle conceit of the Country Gentlemen that a temperate Reform would put an end to grievances and distress," and while the House of Lords could, and did, make amends, the unpleasant fact remained that the peers could not resist the lower house indefinitely.¹ With the Whigs closing their ranks on reform and the independents also flirting coyly, there was a very real danger that the government would find itself forsaken on a fundamental of its credo, and if that happened, short of apostasy, nothing could be done. The optimists no doubt played down the incident as some passing spasm of irritation or a sop to the country which could do no harm. Nevertheless, no one could be certain. After the triple disappointment on the Drappond bill and Lambton's and Lord John Russell's motions, what the ministers looked for most was a grand spanking victory in favour of the status quo.

Mainly, the problem was a problem of authority in the House of Commons. A period of despondency and hardship such as the country experienced after 1815 would have visited any administration with parliament's displeasure, but in this case the country gentlemen were turning hostile less because the government was wrong than because it was weak. In the early nineteenth century when political loyalties tended to become more and more personalized with the Crown's declining influence

1 Huskisson to Canning, 20 February 1821, Canning MSS.

the Treasury bench had to command a reasonable proportion of the talent of the House in order to survive, another way of saying that the right men were just as important as the right measures. An administration which in the opinion of a majority of the Commons had misgoverned the country was killed instantly. One which could not govern the House in appearance as well as in fact met a slower death as the impression of weakness was increasingly mistaken for the reality. Precisely this portended in 1821. Though the government emerged triumphant from the debates on the Queen, the showing of its front bench was miserable in the extreme. On Lord Archibald Hamilton's motion only Castlereagh and Robinson spoke, the latter losing himself and sitting down abruptly after barely quarter of an hour.¹ On the next Bragge-Bathurst's rising was greeted with loud jeers and a mass exodus from the chamber.² On the last not one minister or member of the government spoke at all. With Canning and Peel out of office it was obvious that the administration had less than sufficient talent to keep the Whigs in their place, and soon after they had expressed their confidence the country gentlemen were "loud in their representations to Ministers of the necessity of their strengthening themselves, if they wish for a continuance of support."³ Painfully aware of the government's weakness, the Cabinet did not need any prompting. Indeed, following the embarrassing defeat on the Grampound question, Lord Liverpool was driven to distraction lest Canning fail to turn up for Lambton's debate.⁴

1 For accounts of the debate see Huskisson to Canning, 30 January 1821, Canning MSS; George IV, 11.407-9.

2 Charles Ellis to Canning, 8 February 1821, Canning MSS. See Creevey's cutting comment: "Brother Bragge could scarcely be heard, in which he was highly judicious." Creevey, 11.12.

3 Buckingham, George IV, 1.118.

4 Charles Ellis to Canning, 16 February 1821, Canning MSS.

Nevertheless, an arrangement which had to take into account any number of conflicting aspirations could not be settled overnight, however anxious everyone was to remove the patch resulting from Canning's resignation and make a lasting repair. The Prime Minister's first plan was to give Vansittart the India Board, Peel the Exchequer, Canning the Admiralty - for which he had always had a preference - and Melville the Home Office. On the face of things such an arrangement seemed eminently acceptable; when asked Sidmouth had no compunctions about retiring, and having offered to take the India Board the previous December Vansittart was hardly likely to mind his demotion now. What Liverpool overlooked was Castlereagh's (now Lord Londonderry) wariness of possible rivals and Canning's equally strong determination not to play second fiddle for the rest of his days. Curiously enough, Londonderry saw Peel as more of a threat to his primacy than Canning, which shows just how carefully the latter, mindful of the 1809 fiasco, was covering his tracks. When Peel's promotion to the Exchequer was first mooted in ministerial circles, Londonderry immediately interposed a number of fatuous objections; that the balance of power between Catholics and Protestants would be destroyed, that bad blood would be created between Vansittart and the rest of the Cabinet, and that Peel as yet lacked the necessary qualifications for high office.¹ The kindest explanation for his conduct is either that he wished to bring one of his own men, probably Robinson, forward, or that after Plunket's success in getting a committee on the Catholic claims and two relief bills through the Commons he thought the

1 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.82, 89-90. Castlereagh repeated these arguments some months later when the government was negotiating with the Grenvilles. See memorandum of a conversation between Lord Liverpool and Lord Buckingham, 30 November, memorandum of a conversation between Londonderry, Buckingham and Williams-Wynn, 5 December 1821, Grenville MSS.

front bench should become rather more Catholic. Unlike Vansittart Peel was not simply a Protestant but the Protestant leader, and since the Chancellor of the Exchequer "from the nature of his office, ought in time of peace to be the most powerful member of the Government" Londonderry may have feared that a competition for power would aggravate the difference of opinion on the Catholic issue, which Plunket had succeeded in exciting, and make neutrality less and less practicable. Even so, many of his objections seemed to have a personal venom. To say that Peel was "decidedly a bad debater" was to ignore the fact that he was easily the best of the other young aspirants and probably almost a match for Londonderry himself. To infer that he was unfitted for high office after six years as Irish Secretary was equally absurd, if only because he who now complained had served exactly the same apprenticeship. Somewhere in Londonderry's makeup there was a mean streak which led him to resent abler men and which came into particular prominence when the country increasingly vilified him. Notwithstanding his success as a diplomatist, notwithstanding his popularity as manager of the Commons, he found himself constantly ridiculed as a blundering speaker, as ignorant on finance, as too fond of Europe; and a nature as proud and sensitive as his was found such attacks more and more difficult to bear. By using the utmost discretion Canning had avoided the accusations of making a party against him which Peel now suffered, but as long as he remained Leader of the House it was difficult to see how the talents of either could receive a proper recognition.

Precisely this made Canning hesitate between accepting a certain offer of office at home and trusting to luck that the governor-generalship of India would shortly become his. On one point his mind was quite made up, and that was that he would

never accept a permanent appointment as Londonderry's "lieutenant-General?" "If there was any high-way making hereabouts (upon Mr Mac Adam's new principles)," he wrote half jocularly, half seriously to his wife, "I would rather work upon it, for my subsistence."¹ Sometimes his despair almost got the better of him. In another letter written after a series of brilliant speeches in support of the relief measures for Catholics he reflected bitterly:

... in truth I am sick of the whole thing. I have nothing now to gain in Parly reputation - The last three weeks have placed that at the pinnacle. All to come is risk, rather than gain. And what does the reputation of being the first Speaker in the H of C do for me? Nothing. It only leads people to believe that first speaking is not necessary for carrying on the affairs of the Government - that it is very well to have - very delightful to witness - but that business ~~can go~~ can very well without it. And so it can. And the more it goes on without me the better. I am weary - & at 51 or thereabouts I cannot afford, either in the common or in the moral sense of that word, to hazard new experiments, & new combinations, as I could with the probability of 20 years before me. The next step - whatever it be - must be decisive for life - & if it be as barren of advantage as all former steps have been - I shall have done little for the comfort of old age, & for that of those whom I ought to have thought of long ago rather than of my own etiquettes & points of honour.²

The alternatives facing him became clearer when the Prime Minister saw him twice towards the end of April. Though most of the Cabinet thought his resignation in December 1820 was of a piece with his former conduct,³ it was readily admitted on all sides that he was an invaluable friend and a dangerous enemy, and Liverpool intimated accordingly that he might have the option of the Admiralty and the Home Office. This, of course,

1 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 16 April 1821, Canning MSS.

2 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 3 April 1821, *ibid.*

3 Lord Sidmouth to Bragge-Bathurst, 15 December 1820, Sidmouth MSS; Lord Harrowby to Lord Sandon, 21 December 1820, Harrowby MSS, 59, f.97.

fell far short of what he wanted. Indeed, unaccompanied by any assurance that Londonderry would move upstairs it looked distinctly unacceptable. The only terms on which it could conceivably be agreeable were if, forgetting the inconvenience to his Liverpool friends, he took a temporary lease of office on the plain understanding that the government would secure his nomination to India. Yet the retreat to the East seemed as far away as ever. The Chairs at East India House favoured his candidature certainly, but Hastings gave no hint of leaving Calcutta, the government was loath to recall him, and the most that Canning could wring out of Liverpool was a non-committal mutter that his claims were "fully admitted." For him, to all intents and purposes, the choice had narrowed down to accepting office once again as Londonderry's subordinate, staying out and hoping against hope that India would not escape him or complete retirement from public life. Luckily, with so much pending on the outcome of other negotiations, Liverpool did not require an immediate answer. At the end of April Canning returned to the Continent to await developments and ponder his position.¹

By this time or very soon afterwards Vansittart's replacement by Peel was no longer in question. Londonderry made another furious protest at the beginning of May which Wellington appeared to endorse, and the amiable Melville finally persuaded the Prime Minister "that at best it wd be an experiment" when "he could go on perfectly well with Van." The changes now intended were for Peel to take the India Board, Canning the Admiralty and Melville the Home Office, with an approach also to Wellesley Pole to see whether he would vacate the Mint, probably,

1 The result of Canning's interviews with Liverpool on 20 and 23 April and his meditations on the subject of his political future can be traced in his letters to his wife, 27 March, 3, 6, 13, 16, 24 April 1821, Canning MSS.

though the point remains uncertain, in favour of one of the Grenvilles.¹ Hobhouse guessed exactly what was afoot: "Ld. Lpool.," he wrote in his diary, "now considers that the first object is to recal Canning, the second to introduce Peel, and the third to take in some of the Grenvilles."² For all that, within a fortnight it looked very much as if he would achieve none of them. When Wellington at Liverpool's behest called on his elder brother he met with a brusque reception, Peel indignantly refusing to quit and regarding the mere suggestion as a positive insult,³ and an even greater blow was Peel's polite but firm rejection of the India Board or, what some ministers feared, of office in general. Liverpool asked to see the latter on 30 May, and wary that in the event of Canning's refusal he might have something better to offer he put the proposition "in a strange, shuffling, hesitating sort of way," offering nothing specific but hinting all the while that the India Board was the least he would have. Not surprisingly, Peel retired more puzzled than enlightened. To clear the air he sought a further interview a few days later. There can be little doubt, though he continually complained of his poor state of health, that the office was not to his liking, and once he ascertained that the Prime Minister had indeed meant the India Board he was prompt to return a flat negative. "And anything else I should offer?" Liverpool inquired hastily, anxious to know whether Peel was to be put completely out of his calculations. "When anything else should be offered, it would be time enough to decide on it" was the frosty reply, which really left the government none the wiser. The Prime Minister only had

1 Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1.89-90, 92, 94-5.

2 Hobhouse, p.58.

3 Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1.96, 99.

himself to blame for the slight misunderstanding. Had he begun at the beginning and settled with Sidmouth and Canning beforehand, or failing that given Peel his full confidence, much of the embarrassment would have been avoided. Talking in generalities and making half propositions aroused everyone's suspicions.¹

The decisive setback to the whole arrangement, however, was the King's reluctance to part with Sidmouth and his utter determination never again to have Canning as his confidential and responsible adviser. The day after his first interview with Peel Lord Liverpool went to Carlton House and on his broaching the subject George let it be known straight away that Canning's readmission would be regarded as a personal affront. To make matters worse, there was also a tiff over whether Sidmouth should have a pension in addition to his Clerkship of the Pells, which the next day with the Chancellor's connivance deepened into a contest whether or not he should keep a place in the Cabinet.² At the outset it is hard to imagine that Liverpool was unduly alarmed. The King often swore defiance to the last against his ministers but among them it was almost a standing joke that in the end he always ate his words. What really brought the premier to the verge of resignation was the way the rest of the Cabinet ganged up against him in order to effect Canning's permanent exclusion. In truth, it was a surprising change of heart, since for weeks those in the know seemed to take Canning's promotion for granted. The only possible explanation is that a whisper of his Indian ambitions had at last got around - the Arbuthnots and Hobhouse at least knew the

1 For the approach to Peel see *ibid.*, p.97; Croker, i.186-191; Bathurst, pp.497-8.

2 Hobhouse, pp.58-61; the King to Lord Liverpool, 1 June 1821, Add. MSS. 38190, f.43; George IV, ii.436.

secret¹ - and encouraged by the King's opposition his enemies seized the opportunity to get rid of him for good. Londonderry and Lord Bathurst both began to urge that Sidmouth should not stir for the time being, which would have left Canning only the India Board, and the Home Secretary succumbed to their entreaties sufficiently to warn Liverpool that he would obey the King's commands to stay until an inferior Cabinet office became available if he felt this to be at all necessary. Facing such incorrigible opposition, the Prime Minister played his master card, a scarcely veiled threat that if Sidmouth did not shift to make room for Canning his own resignation would shortly follow. As he had calculated, at this everyone came to their senses smartly. Sidmouth told the King that he was absolutely resolved to quit the Home Office, Liverpool was given permission to explain himself in writing and Londonderry tacitly admitted that any negotiation should proceed "upon a broad Intelligible Publick Principle."²

Even so, having regained the initiative the Prime Minister inadvertently soon lost it again through a domestic tragedy which utterly destroyed his already drooping spirits and temporarily removed him from the scene altogether. His letter to the King expounding his proposals on Londonderry's "broad Intelligible Publick Principle" suggested an arrangement between the government and "those individuals and interests" with whom "there exists a general coincidence of opinion on the great principles of domestic and foreign policy," in practical terms the India Board for Charles Williams-Wynn, the Home Office for Melville and the Admiralty for Canning, regard being had

1 Hobhouse, p.58; Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1.90.

2 Hobhouse, pp.61-3; Lord Liverpool to Lord Londonderry, Lord Londonderry to Lord Liverpool, 10 June 1821, Add. MSS. 38289, f.204.

"to all the considerations of talents, standing in political life, and former connexion with the existing Government."¹ To all this the King's reply was cold and uncompromising, hostile enough to snap the last strings of self-control in the highly strung Liverpool. "The King," he was told, "can see no necessity, and consequently has no wish, or intention of changing the present frame of his Government," and that since Sidmouth could be better employed than as a minister without portfolio "surely some arrangement with his colleagues might be satisfactorily made, to effect this desirable object."² Though as Lord Londonderry remarked "the ostensible objection" was that Sidmouth should have an office he had already declined, the implication contained in the rest was sufficient to provoke a paroxysm of rage in which the letter and its author were equally abused.³ Still, all was not yet lost. Simmering down Liverpool realised that until Canning was positively forbidden office there was room for negotiation, and accordingly he at once dashed off a note requesting to know "your Majesty's determination as to what he has most humbly proposed whenever your Majesty shall have fully consider'd it."⁴ At precisely this moment fate intervened. A few hours after the letter had been sent Lady Liverpool who had been at death's door for weeks finally expired, and in the agony of his anguish her devoted husband came very near to total physical collapse. Unable to spare a thought for public concerns, indeed ordered by his doctors to take a complete rest, he remained incommunicado for three or four days. Only on learning from Arbuthnot that the King was as obdurate as ever and his colleagues wavering did he

1 Liverpool, iii.142-4.

2 George IV, ii.437.

3 Lord Londonderry to Lord Liverpool, /11 June 1821/, Add. MSS. 38289, f.208; Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.100.

4 George IV, ii.437.

rouse himself, and then only to say that "a secret scheme" for weakening the government was in evidence, that Canning's admission was a test of the sovereign's goodwill and that he for his part would resign rather than submit.¹ Obviously, this new ultimatum, which was believed to jeopardise the entire administration, left the next move to the ministers. Nor did they shirk their god-found opportunity to impose their own compromise. While they quite appreciated the need for an infusion of talent, while they realised that Canning could attract both fame and an opposition as a proscribed person, forever impressing itself on their minds was the chance that in a few months' time he might be safely consigned to an Indian exile. Time was what they wanted and what they sought, time during which the issue would be suspended, Canning removed and the government saved. At a meeting held at Londonderry's house, Wellington, Bathurst, Sidmouth and Melville agreed unanimously "that there was no reason for readmitting Canning into the Cabinet, except to prevent his becoming a rallying point for the dissatisfied friends of the Govt," which led to further declarations that they would stay on if Liverpool saw fit to resign and refuse to force Canning on the King if his proscription was made a matter of time not principle.²

By the time the Prime Minister returned from Gloucestershire whence he had gone to attend his wife's funeral he had no hope at all of bringing the Cabinet to heel. Even before he left Town Melville and Sidmouth intimated that they would never be parties to an arrangement which foisted Canning on the King, and while he was away Harrowby added his voice to the rest of the rebels. Still more provoking, having kept possession of

1 Liverpool, iii.146-7; Lord Liverpool to Arbuthnot, 15 June 1821, Add. MSS. 38289, f.209; Hobhouse, p.64.

2 Arbuthnot, pp.23-4; Hobhouse, pp.64, 65.

the royal ear, they persuaded the King to assist their plans by wholly disclaiming "the idea of absolute and interminable exclusion," which immediately knocked flat Liverpool's argument of a Court plot to keep the government permanently debilitated.¹ In these circumstances the best the Prime Minister could do was submit with good grace. Already Canning had written him a handsome letter absolving him from any obligation he may have felt on his account,² and since the contest was fast becoming the talk of the Town it seemed wiser by far to let the matter drop before the government's weakness at Court became too apparent to be denied. The one point it was important to make clear, however, was that the King, except perhaps where offices connected with his "personal service" were concerned, should always select his ministers on public grounds and public grounds alone. Canning's exclusion therefore was to be regarded as temporary with the government reserving a full right to renew the subject before the next session of parliament. Moreover, to emphasise that "personal pique and resentment" were not the cause of the suspension the Grenvilles were also to wait and Sidmouth was to stay on purely as a favour in view of the forthcoming royal visit to Ireland. None of the parties concerned could really object to these terms; Canning still disliked the thought of office at home, Sidmouth who a fortnight ago had spoken of his absolute determination to quit was perfectly ready to stay, and the rest of the Cabinet sat back smugly satisfied that much could happen in six months. Only the King seemed to grudge Liverpool's interpretation of his constitutional role. While he stoutly denied that he was a "prosciber of persons," he continued to insist that his personal honour was the real

1 Ibid., pp.65, 66, 67.

2 Canning to Lord Liverpool, 22 June 1821, Add. MSS. 38193, ff.156-7.

issue at stake, and from him there came no certain promise that he would drop his opposition when the negotiation recommenced.¹

Of course, the constitutional issue was what the struggle was fundamentally all about. As the Prime Minister put it: "it is not Mr Canning out of office, but Mr Canning out of office by the personal exclusion of the King, agreed to by his Government, which is the question." Alone, he clung to the notion that the King's right to choose his own ministers had to be qualified by the advice of the Cabinet where that advice did not recommend a man of low character, of dubious loyalty or of "strong discordance of opinion on political events actually depending." George in contrast insisted that account should be taken of his personal feelings whether or not the office was one of constant personal intercourse, and the other ministers and Canning himself, in refusing to be a party to any arrangement which would force his wishes, seemingly agreed. Nevertheless, by giving way to them Liverpool did not yield his ground. He saw the issue as merely postponed. Unlike Wellington, and probably the rest of his colleagues, whose foremost object was to keep the Whigs out and prevent the country's ruin, he continued to regard Canning's readmission as a political necessity for which he was quite prepared to resign. A stand had to be made against the royal fads and fancies because these were the source of all "past errors and calamities," and "a further stock of humiliations" awaited the government if the constitutional proprieties governing the prerogative of appointment were not now distinctly recognised. Proudly he remembered that it had been he who had induced George III to bring in Fox in 1806. But whether he could do the like again seemed highly doubtful. For one thing the King had taken a pronounced dislike to what he regarded as his unfeeling and dictatorial ways.

1 Liverpool, iii.147-9; George IV, ii.441.

For another the rest of the Cabinet, while admitting that Canning's talents were better employed on their behalf if not the East India Company's, thought his proscription a lesser evil than a Whig-Radical administration, and when they remained in this frame of mind Liverpool could hardly hope to blackmail them into compliance by a threat of resignation. Perhaps, unlikely though it appeared at the moment, the King would relent, for as a man he was incapable of living in an atmosphere of tension and bad feeling for very long. Failing that, everything depended on Liverpool and Canning. If the latter could be persuaded to give up, or of his own accord gave up the idea of office at home in return for assistance in procuring India, all would yet be well. If he refused both he and the Prime Minister were almost certain political casualties.¹

1 For the difference of opinion between the Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues over Canning's readmission see Liverpool, iii.146-7; Arbuthnot, pp.23-4, 24 n.2; Wellington, Desp. (new series), i.176-7; Bathurst, pp.499-501.

NEW MEN AND OLD MEASURES.

The three months which followed the truce of July made it seem more and more likely that the Prime Minister would be the main victim if the war was ever renewed. By the time the Coronation was over and the royal visit to Ireland about to begin the King was seething with fury at what he represented were yet further attempts to encroach on his personal prerogative, and true to his usual form he began a brisk trade in insults to put the culprit firmly in his place. The trouble began over promotions among the Irish peerage on the occasion of the Coronation. With the King's permission the Lord Lieutenant and the Prime Minister drew up a list between them, but showing in the circumstances an unpardonable lack of tact, Liverpool sent the warrants to Carlton House without consulting him further and in a passion he refused to sign any. To drive the point home Green Ribands were promised to Lauderdale, Melville and Cassillis before the Prime Minister could object, notwithstanding that the honour was highly coveted and the number of knights hitherto limited to twelve.¹ These were pin-pricks at best however. The battle royal threatened to be over an appointment to supply the Marquis of Hertford's place as Lord Chamberlain, an office which combined considerable patronage in the Household with personal attendance on the sovereign, and therefore one of no mean political significance. From the start the King took offence because Hertford sent his letter of resignation to Lord Liverpool which at once implied that the position was part and parcel of the government's patronage. When the Prime Minister sought to reassure him that his personal

1 Hobhouse, pp.68, 69-70; Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.105.

feelings would be fully taken into account the snappy reply came back that he should distinctly understand "that whatever appointments the King may think proper to make in his own family, they are to be considered as quite independent of the controul of any Minister whatever." Even the King's word that he would choose none but a friend of government cut little ice in the circumstances. The obvious favourite for the job was the Marquis of Conyngham, the husband of George's latest conquest, but determined at all costs to avoid aspersions of petticoat influence which would do neither them nor the King much honour the ministers lost no time in agreeing that the most he should have around Court was a post purely honorary. Though the advice was only commonsense, the King still insisted on showing himself master in his own house. Whether Conyngham was actually offered Hertford's place and refused is not clear, but within a day or two he was being proposed as Master of the Horse, a position hardly less objectionable insofar as the incumbent was allowed unrestricted use of the royal liveries. In the end it took a lecture from Sidmouth on the need to keep up a facade at least of decency to persuade the King to take stock of his true situation, and even this had a limited effect because all he would promise was that no appointment would take place until he returned from Ireland.¹

At the beginning of August, then, the Cabinet were not sorry to wish the King godspeed and a lengthy sojourn on the other side of the Irish Sea. Remembering the row over Canning, the social slight they had incurred and the prominence of the Whigs in posts of honour at the Coronation, they could

1 Hobhouse, pp.68-9, 70-1; George IV, ii.446-7, 448-9; Arbuthnot to Lord Liverpool, 22, [23/ July 1821, Add. MSS. 38289, ff.267-8, 38290, ff.229-32; Arbuthnot, p.25; Bathurst, pp.502-3, 504, 506, 507.

not help feeling, in Wellington's words, that "His M^ajesty has in several recent instances shown to His Ministers & to the World that they do not possess His Confidence," and since Lord Liverpool bore the brunt of the humiliations there was ever a lurking fear that he would stand so much and no more with disastrous consequences for the administration as a whole.¹ Croker indeed, after hearing a long revilement of the Prime Minister in the Closet, could not see how he could possibly stay, the King finding him "captious, jealous, and impracticable," always objecting and never indulging.² And there was no obvious heir apparent. Of his two chief lieutenants, forgetting Sidmouth who was preparing to superannuate himself, Wellington by some strange fancy was thought to be above party and Londonderry too Catholic by half for the ultra-Protestants' liking.³ Liverpool seemed to be the administration's linchpin, the one man who could hold together a shaky reconstruction of Pitt's old party, the one man perhaps who stood between the Radicals and the national calamity of popular government.

Seen in this light, the riot with which the City paid its last respects to the Queen was the worst that could have happened while the King was away. As Lord Bathurst succinctly put it: "as we have been for some time at single anchor, I think the storm may most probably take us out to sea."⁴ The

1 See "Substance of a Conversation between the Duke of Wellington, Sir B. Bloomfield, & Mr. Arbuthnot," 21 July 1821, Add. MSS. 38370, ff.25-31 in which Wellington also warns the King's private secretary that the government must be allowed to strengthen itself or it would be destroyed with all the baneful consequences of a Radical takeover. His colleagues fully approved what he said. Arbuthnot, p.25; Bathurst, pp.502-3.

2 Croker, i.198-9.

3 e.g. See Eldon, ii.434-5.

4 Bathurst, p.512.

immediate arrangements consequent on the Queen's death caused little upset. Apart from being annoyed that almost the first he knew of her illness was word of its fatal termination, the King readily agreed with Lord Liverpool "that nothing should be omitted which Decency & Decorum require," and orders for his private entry into Dublin, a period of Court mourning and removal of the body to Brunswick were issued as early as communications between Ireland and London permitted.¹ Alas, where the Queen was concerned, decency and decorum could not last for very long. When her funeral cortege with its escort of Life Guards attempted to skirt the City en route for Harwich "the inferior sort" who had been her staunchest supporters made one final sally for old times' sake, barricading the streets and forcing the procession past Temple Bar and out along the Essex road. Needless to say, the King was furious. Bloomfield confided to Croker that he sat up most of the night mooning over the affair, and ever after he was constantly comparing the enthusiastic loyalty of his Irish subjects with the violence and perfidy of London.² Even worse, as Sidmouth the minister in attendance quickly noticed, his anger began to turn in Lord Liverpool's direction. Originally it had been decided to move the body by water down the Thames, and the King made up his mind that the contrary decision and all that ensued was the Prime Minister's folly and his alone. Before he left Ireland Sidmouth sent an urgent warning that there would be "Difficulties to

1 The King en route for Ireland in the royal yacht arrived at Holyhead late on 6 August and the Queen died the following night. News reached the King of her serious condition on the morning of the 9th and of her death later the same day. For the correspondence which ensued see George IV, ii.452-3, 453-4; Lord Londonderry to Lord Liverpool, /10 August 1821/, Add. MSS. 38191, ff.63-4; Liverpool, iii.132-3; Lord Sidmouth to Lord Liverpool, 15 August 1821, Sidmouth MSS.

2 Croker, i.202-3.

meet, not inferior, as far as the Government is concerned, to any which we have yet encountered." "The King," he explained a few days later, "is in a very uncomfortable State of Mind. The Circumstances attending The Queen's Funeral, He is perpetually recurring to, in a Manner which shows a Degree of Chagrin, & Irritation, beyond what I have ever observed in Him."¹ His advice was that the government should put itself right with the King by prosecuting and punishing those responsible for the outrage, and forewarned of what was in the wind the ministers gathering in London lost no time in following it. As soon as George disembarked he was confronted with proposals that Sir Robert Wilson and Sir Robert Baker should be dismissed, the one from the army for inciting the crowd, the other from the magistracy for grievous neglect of duty. "It is a great object to us," Lord Liverpool observed, "to place ourselves in a situation of attack rather than in one of defence. This should be done even at some risk of ultimate failure, for, amongst other advantages, it will make the course of the King far more difficult, if he is, as I still believe, meditating hostilities ... against his Government."²

In the event, the King's return passed off better than anyone, most of all Liverpool, expected. Though Lord Londonderry came back with warnings of a "complete breach" and though the whole Cabinet assembled to learn their fate,³ politics turned out to be a forbidden subject at Carlton House,

1 Lord Sidmouth to Lord Liverpool, 27, 29 August 1821, Sidmouth MSS.

2 Bathurst, p.512. See also Lord Bathurst to Lord Sidmouth, 5 September 1821, Sidmouth MSS: "I am sure you will agree with me in thinking that everything depends upon our shewing the King immediately that we are prepared with our Measures - particularly as Liverpool is to be the object of attack from The King."

3 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.116; Croker, i.211.

all attention being given to an autumn visit to Hanover now suddenly decided. In the nine days which elapsed before the King's departure the most Lord Liverpool could do was make a fumbling apology for keeping him in ignorance of the Queen's illness and submit a memorandum explaining why movement of the body by water had been utterly out of the question.¹ The very refusal to talk business, however, looked ominous because usually the King, who hated unpleasantness, was the last person to gnaw a political bone for months on end. This time, it seemed, an abiding sense of personal grievance was causing something more than a perfunctory interest in public matters. Certainly the Prime Minister had no illusions that the heart of the trouble lay elsewhere than with him. Apart from Lord Londonderry's disclosure that the King while in Ireland had tried to tempt both him and Sidmouth with the premiership, he was forced to suffer the ignominy of seeing the Lord Chancellor, Bathurst and Londonderry pass into the Closet before him, only gaining an audience the second day of the King's return, and this snub he took as conclusive evidence that "a personal change" was intended.² "L[iverpool] seems fully aware of the K's undissembled, unqualified dislike of him," Canning commented after paying a call to Fife House.³ With Conyngham a conspicuous member of the royal party to Hanover, with Canning as despised and rejected as ever, it still remained to be seen who commanded the Cabinet's first loyalty - the King or his Prime Minister.

Had the difference ever come to a head, in all likelihood Liverpool would have succumbed, which fairly indicates the limits of political discipline prevailing at this time. As

1 Bathurst, p.517; Memorandum, /September 1821/, Add. MSS. 38289, ff.368-9; George IV, 11.458-64.

2 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.116-17; Croker, i.211-12; Bathurst, p.517.

3 Canning to Huskisson, 22 September 1821, Add.MSS. 38742, f.277.

Arbuthnot and Wellington told their chief in no uncertain terms, the government had to save the country from the Radicals come what may, and if the choice lay between having him out and them in official men would have little hesitation where to stand. Canning, they said, was not indispensable. To be sure, any administration would have found his talents precious, while out of office "he would immediately be surrounded by the discontented of all descriptions & by the Young Philosophers," but he was not worth the Country's irretrievable ruin and there was no reason for believing that parliament would think differently. Without him, without Liverpool even, the government still had a chance of survival, especially if the "intermediate" parties were persuaded to join. Indeed, the feeling was that as always where Canning was concerned the Prime Minister's political vision was being sadly distorted by his personal preferences.¹ What might have happened in 1821 was what eventually did happen in 1827 when with Liverpool removed from the political scene the government split into two irreconcilable factions, though on this occasion the so-called "high Tories" would have stayed in power while the rest joined Canning in uneasy co-operation with the Whigs. That nothing of the sort occurred was due to the King. His attitude towards Canning mellowed remarkably during his not particularly pleasant sojourn in his German dominions. At his departure from England the government had been left in no doubt that the old sore still rankled, Croker being treated to a diatribe almost on the steps of Carlton House,² but within three weeks he was telling Londonderry who had accompanied him thither that while he would not submit to "a continuance of a system which renders my life full of in-

- 1 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.123-4; Wellington Desp. (new series), i.192-6; Arbuthnot, p.24 n.2. See also "Substance of a Conversation between the Duke of Wellington, Sir E. Bloomfield & Mr. Arbuthnot," 21 July 1821, Add. MSS. 38370, ff.25-31.
- 2 Croker, i.213-14; Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.119; Lord Sidmouth to Charles Brugge-Bathurst, 24 September 1821, Sidmouth MSS.

quietude and vexation" he would neither change his government nor insist further on Canning's exclusion. Even so, with regard to the latter he did add two important conditions; on no account was Canning to have an office of "personal communication" and at the first opportunity he was to be packed off to India.¹ Since Londonderry thought it wisest to avoid a discussion by letter, the Prime Minister was only given a hint of the King's change of tune, and then only indirectly through Arbuthnot.² Still, reading between the lines Liverpool learnt enough to cease forthwith his gloomy ruminations. Where he had convinced himself that the negotiation would assume "a Shape in which continuance will be scarcely practicable" he now appeared "in a Temper, the most favourable to useful Discussion & the best calculated to smooth Difficulties."³

The event which made the King adopt a more conciliatory tone was almost certainly news that Hastings was definitely contemplating retirement. From about May 1821 the Court of Directors, the King's private secretary and the Governor-General's friends had received letters complaining of an intrigue to displace him, but while these had shown a readiness to quit Calcutta there had been no word of resignation or demand for recall.⁴ Not surprisingly, no one knew whether a successor should be nominated or not. After having Hastings tell him that "our political relation will probably be soon at an end," Canning concluded it was necessary,⁵ and mindful of the year which elapsed between sending a letter and receiving a reply, many at East

1 George IV. 11.466-7.

2 Ibid., p.465; Lord Londonderry to Arbuthnot, 12 October /1821/, Add. MSS. 38566, ff.71-2.

3 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 4 October 1821, Lord Sidmouth to Lord Londonderry, 30 October 1821, Sidmouth MSS.

4 e.g. George IV. 11.375-7, 405-6, 409.

5 Lord Hastings to Canning, 2 February 1821, Canning to Lord Liverpool, 12, 13 August 1821, Canning MSS.

India House were inclined to agree. Possibly two years would pass before the new viceroy even set foot in India. On the other hand, until Hastings' intentions were clearly known, plenty felt with Lord Liverpool that there was indecency, perhaps illegality in appointing a replacement. Hastings' real game, of course, was to obtain a recall not at the Company's but at the sovereign's behest, for this if accompanied by a mark of honour like an embassy or dukedom would thoroughly vindicate his government of India. When a fresh batch of remonstrant letters arrived towards the end of September the King in a flash saw the solution to all his difficulties.¹ Hastings was indebted to him for his appointment in the first place and if he could be persuaded to return the favour by now retiring - rumours said his resignation was already in England - Canning would obtain his heart's desire and his own honour and comfort would be largely secured. For this much even Canning's temporary presence in the Cabinet was not intolerable, if at all likely.

Possibly his eagerness to spring the trap explained

- 1 Precisely what intelligence the King received in Hanover is not clear. Letters from Lord Hastings certainly arrived while he was there, but according to Lord Liverpool's information they gave no indication that he intended to leave India. Lord Liverpool to Canning, 23 October 1821, *ibid.* On the other hand, Liverpool may well have been misinformed. About the same time that the King received his letters the Chairman of the East India Company also had word from Hastings that his return was imminent, and it is hardly likely that the Governor-General would have openly contradicted himself. Canning's diary, 28 September 1821, *ibid.* A further intriguing possibility is that the King learnt that Colonel Doyle was holding a letter of resignation to be tendered at his discretion. Though on his arrival back in England he professed to know nothing about it there were plenty who thought otherwise. Hobhouse concluded that he "must have been playing a double part for a good while past," having known about Doyle's authority for five or six months. Canning to Lord Liverpool, 29 September 1821, Add. MSS. 38568, ff.96-7; Lord Liverpool to Canning, 7 November 1821, Canning MSS; Hobhouse.

his premature homecoming, almost a fortnight earlier than he had originally planned. Certainly, he arrived back more his old amicable self. "Such a Changed Man as the King you never saw," Londonderry reported to his half-brother in Vienna. "He is in the highest Spirits and says he, Liverpool, is again entitled to all his Confidence."¹ Over the Household there was never a glimmer of further trouble. Londonderry, who returned ahead of the King, went to see Liverpool at Walmer and divulged that though Conyngham was still wanted in the Household the King was perfectly prepared to acquiesce that he hold the lesser post of Lord Steward. At first the Prime Minister hesitated, for even this office was efficient rather than honorary, but no doubt remembering Wellington's advice that the question was a triviality which should not be allowed to impede the larger issue, when next he saw the King he gave his entire concurrence. Montrose was promoted to Chamberlain, Dorset replaced him as Master of the Horse and Cholmondeley, who had been Lord Steward, was consoled with a promise of the Garter and a seat in the Lords for his son and heir.²

Concerning India, to which the whole question of new-modelling the Cabinet was related, things did not go half as smoothly. A few days after his arrival back from Hanover the King sent for Colonel Doyle who as Hastings' confidant in England had been holding a letter of resignation since November

pp.79-80. Certainly, on 3 October Doyle told the Chairman of the East India Company that he was holding Hastings' resignation and word may have reached the King this way. Thomas Reid to Canning, 4 October 1821, Add. MSS. 38411, ff.67-9.

- 1 Lord Londonderry to Lord Stewart, 14 November 1821, Castle-reagh MSS.
- 2 Wellington Desp. (new series), i.194; Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.124, 125-6; Lord Liverpool to Canning, 7 November 1821, Canning MSS; Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 8 November 1821, Sidmouth MSS; Lord Londonderry to Lord Stewart, 21 November 1821, Castlereagh MSS.

1820 to be presented at his discretion. As Canning realised, the initiative to open India lay wholly with the man who despised him.¹ The East India directors would never recall the Governor-General unless the government gave the word: the government would not act "without the Knowledge & Sanction of his Royal Friend & Patron."² Only the King could stop the flow of expostulation and allusion issuing from Calcutta and bring him scurrying home. The purpose of Doyle's interview was to find out whether that advantage could be acted upon immediately. Bearing in mind that Doyle's authority was now a year old, not for a moment did Liverpool think it could. Great then was his surprise to learn that, lured by a promise of the Paris embassy (which Londonderry incidentally may have arranged) Doyle had agreed to submit the resignation.³ Nor was his astonishment unaccompanied by dismay, for this development tumbled every hope of Canning's and indeed his. Both had already agreed that immediate acceptance of India was completely out of the question, mainly because Hastings had made no clear statement of his intentions and to appoint Canning as governor-general designate would look very much like the consummation of the intrigue he had been complaining about. Each had his separate reasons as well. The Prime Minister was convinced that once Canning was safely installed at the Admiralty he would stay in the Cabinet for good, even if there was an understanding that he would eventually retire to India. As for Canning, while the pecuniary temptation was as strong as ever, his wife could not bear the thought of years away from Europe, especially when their daughter was ready to make her social debut, and he yet hoped for time

1 Canning to Lord Liverpool, 3, 4 October 1821, Add. MSS. 38568, ff.100-103, 104-5.

2 Lord Sidmouth to Lord Liverpool, 1 November 1821, Sidmouth MSS.

3 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 16, 19, November 1821, Canning MSS.

to reconcile her to the sacrifice.¹ Now, thanks to the King and probably his enemies in the Cabinet, these plans came to naught. Instead of having office for at least a year and the offer of India when the vacancy had been definitely established, he seemed about to lose both. On hearing that Doyle was ready to oblige the King, Lord Melville hastened to do likewise. By refusing to vacate the Admiralty when India was Canning's for the asking he upset Liverpool's calculations entirely,² for this left open only the Home Office and the India Board; and the King would never have Canning in the one and Canning would never go back to the other. Equally frustrating was the risk that if India was refused now King, government and Company would feel acquitted of any future obligation and no further offer would be forthcoming. Someone else would be appointed to take Hastings' place and all he (Canning) could look forward to was another long spell in the political wilderness. Yet after Liverpool with his usual consideration had arranged a temporary respite for him and he had retired to Welbeck to ponder the matter carefully, there really did seem no alternative to outright refusal. The King was bent on getting him away, many ministers he could not help suspecting were similarly inclined, and since he had made it quite clear to the Prime Minister that he should not jeopardise his own office for his sake or have his name put forward and rejected a second time,³ to all appearances the die was well and truly cast. Returning to London, he at once set to work on a justificatory letter which Liverpool was to forward to the King. Naturally he made no mention of his

1 Canning to Lord Liverpool, 8 October, 10, 11 November 1821, Lord Liverpool to Canning, 7 November 1821, Canning to Mrs. Canning, 15, 16, /19/, November 1821, *ibid.*

2 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.126; Hobhouse, p.79.

3 Canning to Lord Liverpool, 8 October, 10 November 1821, Canning MSS.

domestic difficulties, only saying that he could not accept India when the Governor-General was in a dither whether to stay or quit and, worse, when some would be ready to interpret his acquiescence as a cunning usurpation. Nor did he pledge himself to accept nomination when the way had been cleared, for the simple reason, though he did not state it, that it would lessen his chances of office at home and destroy his freedom of political conduct. The most he wanted the King to understand was that refusal now did not necessarily mean refusal later on. From communication with the "chairs" of the East India Company he knew that pretexts could be invented to delay the proposal of Hastings' successor, and the Prime Minister too was seriously considering the idea of a locum tenens appointment. He still wanted the governor-generalship, indeed still regarded it as preferable to a permanent subordination in parliament and the government. But hamstrung by financial embarrassment he could not afford to wait too long; two sessions without remuneration were the most his purse could stand. Since the King aided by others was fighting to deny him a Cabinet position pro tempore, since it was doubtful whether Liverpool could have forced the issue had he allowed him to try, India was the only resort left to him. If that failed, so it seemed would his life as a public man.¹

Luckily for him, the knife wielded by his enemies was never allowed this last cruel twist. To be sure, not two days after he had declined India Peel accepted with alacrity Liverpool's offer of the Home Office² but when he himself had pledged

1 Canning to Huskisson, 16 November 1821, Add. MSS. 38743, ff.21-2; Canning to Mrs. Canning, 16, 19/, 23, 24, 27, 29 November 1821, Canning to Lord Liverpool, 20 November 1821, Canning MSS; Huskisson to Lord Granville, 29 November 1821/, PRO 30/29.

2 Peel, 1.300-1.

the Prime Minister to save his own skin he really had no cause to complain. As Liverpool and Londonderry discovered when they went down to Brighton to consult the King on the government reshuffle, Canning was to go to India or stew in his own juice, and against this inveterate prejudice the former, whose hopes can never have been high, reluctantly retired in despair.¹ The day after he was writing to Peel, inviting him to take the seals. Nevertheless, looked out in such a peremptory manner Canning could not help feeling aggrieved. He understood the King, correctly it must be added, to have agreed that if India were not immediately available he should hold a Cabinet position in the meantime, and yet before the first point had been definitely ascertained the other alternative had been put wholly out of his reach. Bitterly he began to reflect that Liverpool must have either misunderstood or tricked him or been the dupe of others more cunning than himself. The Prime Minister knew full well that his preference for India was qualified by the circumstances of his appointment, that he wanted to succeed through "a voluntary vacancy" or not at all. Yet here he would have appeared as a pawn in a larger arrangement. Worse still, he had been willing enough to forego his claims to ministerial office provided they endangered the government itself, but no sooner had Lord Liverpool expressed his absolute confidence in this respect and admitted that India was not available on his terms than the door was locked, barred and bolted with nary a breath of an offer.² Actually, in speaking like this Canning did the Prime Minister less than justice. For close on two years he had been reminding him of his aspirations for the "Mogulship" if primacy in the Commons was denied him, and an arrangement which still left him

1 George IV, 11.470-1; Canning's diary, 26, 28 November 1821, Canning MSS.

2 Canning to Huskisson, 24 December 1821, Add. MSS. 38743, ff.86-93.

a chance of their being realised, a good chance since no one in the government wanted him free-lance in parliament for very long, hardly deserved the reproaches he levelled at it. The fact of the matter was that Liverpool, much to his regret, gradually came to see that an opening at home was impossible to achieve, which he was the first to admit left Canning in a limbo of uncertainty. Before Colonel Doyle announced himself ready to tender Hastings' resignation, he was perfectly confident he could secure him a temporary place at the Admiralty. Afterwards he "manifestly apprehended that the question of Office was gone by," and the eagerness of the King and his colleagues to get rid of Canning, exemplified by Melville's refusal to budge, must have finally convinced him.¹ At any rate Canning's sourness was fairly shortlived, for by the end of December he occupied much the same position before Doyle dropped his bomb-shell; that was, "the option of the appointment when the contingency shall arise."² When Hastings' resignation according to the usual form was referred to the East India Company, Canning's supporters in the Court of Directors vehemently disputed its validity and though the point remained in doubt the nomination of a successor was indefinitely postponed. As a result, even if Hastings left India the following day, Canning gained the breathing space he so badly wanted.³ The government too was no less pleased. "I must say," wrote Lord Liverpool discussing arrangements for the provisional government of Bengal should Hastings leave, "that I hold the keeping the situation of Governor General open for Canning as a question of

1 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 16, /19/ November 1821, Canning MSS.

2 Canning to Lord Liverpool, 11 November 1821, *ibid.*; Canning to Huskisson, 5 January 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, ff.112-13.

3 Court of Directors to Lord Hastings, 12 December 1821, Canning MSS; Bragge-Bathurst to Lord Liverpool, 7 December 1821, Canning to Huskisson, 20, 24 December 1821, Add. MSS. 38411, ff. 77-8, 38743, ff.80, 86-7.

Vital importance. We shall find the greatest inconvenience in his being here for any time out of office, and yet his return to office now is rendered nearly impracticable, even if the King's objections could be overruled."¹ With little further ado the governor-generalship dropped neatly into his lap just three months later when Doyle urgently represented that Hastings wanted to leave India for personal reasons but would not do so until his successor had been appointed.²

As far as Canning was concerned, had a position in the Cabinet not eluded him, the office in which he would have found himself would have been either the Admiralty - his and the government's preference - or the Home Office. Not for a moment was it suggested that he might return to the Board of Control, and indeed it was hardly likely that he would have accepted to serve as Peel's inferior even on a professedly temporary basis. But that post was never offered simply because it was never offerable. In July the Cabinet had decided that an approach to the Grenvilles was an essential item in any negotiations to rearrange the government, and since both the King and Lord Buckingham understood that this was so, inasmuch as Bragge-Bathurst's office had been exclusively reserved for their first refusal, in the ministers' minds there was never a doubt that their hands were well tied.³ This part of the

1 Bathurst, p.527.

2 Thomas Reid to Canning, 14 March 1822, Canning to Colonel Doyle, 17 March 1822, Doyle to Canning, 18 March 1822, Canning to Reid, 19 March 1822, Add. MSS. 38411, ff.86-94. Of course, after Peel had accepted the Home Office Canning's great concern was how long he would have to wait before India became his. Shortly before Peel actually received the seals he badgered the Prime Minister to re-cast the arrangement so that he could have the Home Office, and it is a measure of his financial desperation that he was even prepared to relinquish the governor-generalship to get it. Canning to Lord Liverpool, 10 January 1822, *ibid.*, 38568, ff.112-14.

3 Liverpool, iii.142; Buckingham, George IV, i.174-5; Huskisson to Canning, 21 November 1821, Canning to Huskisson, 23 November 1821, Add. MSS. 38743, ff.30, 36.

negotiation, then, could and did proceed quite independently of the other. That it would lead to a conclusion satisfying to both parties was almost taken for granted. From the time they had deserted the main body of the opposition the Grenvilles had given fairly reliable support to the government side but seemingly the real fuel which drove their political engine was an insatiable appetite, an indecent avidity for the lucre of office. Probably the reputation, which was a standing joke among politicians, like most concocted by old enemies and erstwhile friends, was not a little exaggerated. Williams-Wynn, it is certain, had more faith in an administration of moderate Whigs than in one which retained Addingtonian mediocrities such as Vansittart and Bragge-Bathurst and left out Canning and Peel, and Buckingham in consequence was constantly bemoaning his posture of neutrality. Moreover, he took the Grenville pledge of concessions to the Catholics immensely seriously. "If there appeared any reasonable chance of our carrying the Catholic question," he once declared, "I should myself feel that a paramount motive to accede to the government," and judging by his attitude throughout the actual negotiations it is hard not to believe him.¹ Still, a rather colourless personality, remembered best for an encyclopaedic knowledge of standing orders and a voice of peculiar timbre which earned him the nickname "Mr Squeaker," he lived perpetually in the shadow of the head of the connexion, the thrusting, self-important, much less scrupulous Marquis of Buckingham. Where Williams-Wynn viewed the question of coalition with the government as largely a question of expediency the ambitious Buckingham tried to make it a matter of principle. The administration, he argued, was horrifyingly weak and a ready prey for the Radicals as long as it so con-

1 Buckingham, George IV. 1.77-8, 198, 210; Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 23 June 1821, Coed-y-maen MSS.

tinued. They should not wait until the opportunity arrived to form a government "strong enough to carry on the public business advantageously and creditably" but infuse strength into the ailing article without further delay. Speaking of the "calamity" which would follow surrender of power to the Radicals, he knew "no sacrifice too great to be made, no duty so imperious to be followed ... to prevent its falling upon the Country."¹ By the spring of 1821, when rumours of a government reshuffle were making the rounds, this coincidence of duty and self-interest was becoming positively embarrassing for Williams-Wynn and no doubt many others. After the Queen's trial, with the government believed to be near the point of collapse, Buckingham's cousins had been annoyed to find in him "so much disposition to accept office ... that ... he will scarcely be persuaded to reject it."² But now he threw propriety completely to the winds by openly angling for some political reward. Towards the end of March he announced to Wellington that the prize he coveted was the Lord Lieutenancy of Ireland and the tactful rejoinder came back "that there is no man more desirous than I am of strengthening the connexion between your family and the government." Six weeks later, irked by the fact that no offer was forthcoming, he tried a more dubious form of pressure. Fremantle, his stooge and go-between in such matters, called at Apsley House with a message "that the increased acknowledged weakness of the Govt made more extensive communications necessary" and that unless the ministers took positive steps to strengthen themselves they "must not expect assistance as before from me."³

1 Lord Buckingham to Williams-Wynn, 5 November, 24 December 1820, 22 June 1821, *ibid.*

2 Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 2 December 1820, *ibid.*

3 Buckingham, George IV, i.144, 148-9, 150-1, 162-3; Lord Buckingham to Williams-Wynn, 12 June 1821, Coed-y-maen MSS.

Of course, duly informed of the suspension of the negotiations Buckingham had to forget blackmail and bear his impatience as best he could.¹ But after this the ministers could not be blamed for thinking that the right money would buy anything at the sale of the Grenville stud.

Acting by Liverpool's instructions Wellington again got in touch with Fremantle on 21 November, some days before the ministers informed the King of their plans for reconstructing the administration, which shows just how far they felt themselves committed.² As the government hoped, the offer as outlined to Fremantle the following week met with Buckingham's hearty concurrence, though it gave him a dukedom only and office to Williams-Wynn and one other. In addition, Plunket, who was an ally rather than a dependent, was to be Attorney-General in Ireland with a proviso that he take an active part in the House of Commons. "Now my dear Charles," Buckingham wrote to his cousin gushing enthusiasm, "I agree fully to this offer. I have a right to speak strongly upon it, because I am not to have Office. I therefore say that you will be mad if you do not accept the offer yourself. Come up immediately to London where you will hear further."³ Lord Grenville to whom he hastened after receiving Fremantle's report was not nearly so impressed. He thought the Prime Minister as a hatchet-man was being too soft-hearted to do much good, Vansittart in particular deserving no mercy for his incompetence and unpopularity; and when he learnt that Sidmouth was to continue in the Cabinet while Wellesley as a Lord Lieutenant with Catholic sympathies

- 1 Wellington Desp. (new series) i.177; Buckingham, George IV. i.174-5.
- 2 Ibid., p.231. Wellington was at Taddesley, W.J. Littleton's place in Staffordshire and Arbuthnot probably brought the message down. Huskisson to Canning, 21 November 1821, Add. MSS. 38743, ff.30-3.
- 3 Buckingham, George IV. i.232-5; Lord Buckingham to Williams-Wynn, 28 November 1821, Coed-y-maen MSS.

was to be checked by Peel in London and Goulburn in Dublin he began to argue vehemently that the government had become vastly too orange for a Grenville to give it countenance. This latter objection in fact he never renounced and constituted the main difficulty, for, as Buckingham snidely remarked, Williams-Wynn's "fears always keep pace with his Uncle's."¹ The government's reply naturally referred back to the principle adopted in 1812 which gave every minister and official man a freedom to pursue or oppose concessions to the Catholics as a private member, but Londonderry, who took over the negotiations when Liverpool departed to Bath for a recuperative holiday, also defended the Dublin appointments as essential for the conciliation of an Ireland again experiencing a rising tide of disorder and violence. At the Home Office Peel's understanding of the Irish problem would be invaluable, no one could deny Goulburn's talents as a man of business and between them Wellesley and Plunket would prevent any preponderance of Protestant feeling at Dublin Castle. Indeed, he even went so far as to argue that if the Grenvilles spurned the government's offer "the Catholics naturally would take the alarm and conclude that they did so from finding the Catholic Question in so hopeless a state as to make it impossible for them to take office, that this would have the worst effect upon the public mind there and make the pacification of that country a most distant and doubtful measure."² Gradually, mainly by threatening to withdraw from politics altogether,

- 1 Buckingham, George IV. i.235-6; Lord Grenville to Williams-Wynn, 7 December 1821, Coed-y-maen MSS; Lord Buckingham to Lord Wellesley, 3 December 1821, Lord Sidmouth to Lord Liverpool, 9 December 1821, Add. MSS. 37310, ff. 189-92, 38290, ff.137-8.
- 2 Memorandum of Lord Liverpool's conference with Lord Buckingham, 30 November 1821, Lord Buckingham to Lord Grenville, 1 December 1821, memorandum of conference between Lord Londonderry, Lord Buckingham and Williams-Wynn, 5 December 1821, Grenville MSS; Liverpool, iii.160-1.

Buckingham brought his cousin round. To be sure, whatever Lord Grenville said, the public arguments in favour of a junction easily outweighed those against. Not only would they strengthen the Catholic element in the government by joining, with complete freedom to pursue their opinions on the subject which mattered most to them, but Wellesley was cocksure he could defeat any Protestant cabals against his authority, Plunket would become Attorney-General regardless of what they did and Canning was believed to have pledged himself not to go into opposition. In other words, if they turned down this offer beyond all doubt they would cease to exist as an effective political force, for some would join and the rest would stay out while the government had made itself stronger than ever in the meantime.¹ Things came to a head between Buckingham and Williams-Wynn on 7 December. On that day a letter arrived from Lord Grenville repeating the argument that the Protestant bias of the arrangements was too strong for comfort and warning the second that all he had heard from Londonderry of his freedom of action in the Catholic question was a "beautiful metaphor" and "not one word of explanation." Buckingham replied immediately with a strong remonstrance lamenting that his cousin would now be "guided entirely by considerations hostile to mine," the hereditary honour sought by his father lost for ever and the family's political greatness brought to an untimely end. Clearly, the final decision rested with Williams-Wynn, and already impressed with his cousin's "vehemence & eagerness almost dictation" which could lead "not only to Political but Personal

1 Lord Buckingham to Lord Grenville, 30 November, 3/, 6 December 1821, memorandum of Lord Liverpool's conference with Lord Buckingham, 30 November 1821, Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 4/, 5 December 1821/, Grenville MSS; Lord Buckingham to Lord Wellesley, 3 December 1821, Add. MSS. 37310, ff.189-92; Buckingham George IV, 1.238-40; The Life, Letters and Speeches of Lord Plunket, 11.86-9.

disunion" he at length agreed to accept.¹ The only stipulations he insisted upon, partly out of deference to Lord Grenville, partly to show that his action was principled, were full permission to press emancipation even to the point of resignation and perfect liberty to criticise Goulburn's appointment as encouraging "apprehension in the public mind of counter action and opposition between the Lord Lieutenant and his secretary." These, of course, the Prime Minister had no difficulty in accepting.² Hereafter the only delay resulted from the government's and the Grenvilles' mutual desire to make Plunket's appointment coincide with the others. By letting it appear that the entire plan of reconstruction depended on Plunket's procurement a vacancy for him was soon created, though it did mean two retirements, a new Chief Justice and a new Solicitor-General.³ On 17 January 1822 Peel and Williams-Wynn went through the pantomime of kissing hands and the transaction was complete.

On the face of it the aim of the negotiations with Peel and the Grenvilles was simply to strengthen the government in the House of Commons. The Prime Minister in fact said that they were "grounded on this consideration alone" when he saw Fremantle in the interview which opened proceedings with the Grenvilles, and his insistence that Williams-Wynn and not Buckingham should have a place in the Cabinet and that Plunket as Attorney-General in Ireland should take his fair share of debate

- 1 Lord Buckingham to Williams-Wynn, 3, 8 December 1821, Lord Grenville to Williams-Wynn, 7 December 1821, Coed-y-maen MSS; Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 15 December 1821, Lord Buckingham to Lord Grenville, 7 December 1821, Grenville MSS; Liverpool, iii.163.
- 2 Buckingham, George IV, i.249-53; Williams-Wynn to Lord Liverpool, 13 December 1821, Add. MSS. 38290, f.199.
- 3 Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 10 December 1821, Lord Sidmouth to Lord Manners, 12 December 1821, Lord Sidmouth to Brugge-Bathurst, 6 January 1822, Sidmouth MSS; Lord Buckingham to Lord Liverpool, 14 December 1821, Add. MSS. 38290, ff.155-7; Buckingham, George IV, i.255-6.

must seemingly have driven the point home.¹ Yet it is hard to believe that this was the real motive behind the changes. In the first place, if the ministers wanted numbers their new allies brought them very few. Probably Buckingham and Wellesley together could muster no more than twenty certain votes, and when it is remembered that, generally speaking, these had been employed on the government's behalf anyway the balance of parties was barely disturbed. In the second, if speaking talent was wanted it is possible to argue that the Treasury Bench was no more articulate than it was before. Peel tended to wrap himself up in the specialities of his own department, Williams-Wynn's treble and his longwindedness on points of parliamentary procedure rendered him ludicrous and Plunket did not pull his weight in general debate as much as the Cabinet had bargained on. The long and short of it was that Londonderry still bore the brunt of the opposition's attacks with no absolute guarantee that Canning's brilliant eloquence would be for ever at the government's service. Not surprisingly, Lord Grenville could see neither rhyme nor reason in the change. "What is called strengthening Government in the House of Commons," he observed to his nephew, "consists in driving Canning into opposition, who was before the best speaker on the Government side, and having Peel in Government, who was before a speaker also on their side."² Without doubt the ministers' real motives must have been different from what they professed, or at least rather more complex. Of course they realised that there were mediocrities among their number - Liverpool readily admitted that Vansittart "had an ungracious and undecided way of doing business" and Londonderry that "his situation as leader of the House was weaker than it ought"³ - but their overriding anxiety was less to

1 Ibid., pp.232-3.

2 Ibid., p.244.

3 Memorandum of Lord Liverpool's conference with Lord Buckingham, 30 November 1821, memorandum of conference between Lord Londonderry, Lord Buckingham and Williams-Wynn, 5 December

recruit talent than form in eighteenth century terms a broad-bottomed administration. Always at the back of their minds there lurked the fear that if they went out a moderate Whig like Lansdowne could join with Wellesley and Buckingham and establish a viable government independent of the Radicals. By absorbing these "intermediate" parties, on the other hand, the only alternative left dissident country gentlemen would be the awful one of Grey, Burdett and company, which most verily believed would end with a republic and civil chaos, and the augmented confidence of parliament and the country would be the natural and inevitable consequence. "Let him have his explanation," Londonderry wrote advising the Prime Minister to accept Williams-Wynn's stipulations, "and consider his comments as constituting no difficulty to our union. In this way you will be sure of taking this connection out of that central position in the House of Commons which invites intrigue, and might facilitate an intermediate arrangement. I regard this as constituting the preponderating motive for forming this connection."¹ Almost certainly, most regarded the new arrangements as a reunion of Pitt's old party split asunder since 1801, an accession, in Liverpool's words, of "those individuals and interests ... between which and the Government there exists a general coincidence of opinion on the great principles of domestic and foreign policy."² Much of this was undeniably true. Wellesley and the Grenvilles had both held office in Pitt's first administration, except for their deep rooted aversion of Sidmouth they might have joined Liverpool in 1812 not 1821, and with their

1821, Grenville MSS.

- 1 Liverpool, iii.163. See also Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.133.
- 2 Huskisson to Lord Granville, 3 December 1821, PRO 30/29; Huskisson to Lord Binning, 6 December 1821, Lord Liverpool to Huskisson, 8 January 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, ff.59, 115; Liverpool, iii.142.

accession all who were left in declared opposition were the lineal descendants of Fox. But to say that a sentimental desire for reconciliation was the driving force of the negotiations is obviously an overstatement. The Grenvilles were invited to share office because it was feared they might otherwise share it with the Whigs. Wellesley was dangerous because he was able, and when the Irish troubles made a change at Dublin necessary his appointment was a stone to kill two birds. The government was facing hard facts, not making heart-warming gestures.

Whether increased political dimensions would give an administration the increasing confidence of parliament remained a moot point. Certainly, with yet another good harvest in 1821 causing the paradox of distress in a land of plenty, the government fully expected the country gentlemen to arrive back in high dudgeon. The New Year signalled a fresh round of protest meetings which led to parliament being bombarded by salvo after salvo of fiercely-worded petitions complaining of everything from the system of representation to exorbitant government spending and the gigantic confidence trick perpetrated on the nation by "Peel's Act" of 1819. Of course, it went without saying that no matter how hard the landed interest pressed the government the ministers would only go so far and no further to meet its demands. Stubbornly, they stuck to the line that the prevailing distress was an evil beyond the wit of man to control or redress. Advisedly, they refused to tamper anew with the currency, while acknowledging the deflation which had accompanied the return to gold. Perforce, they remained intransigent on the subject of parliamentary reform, though the petitions showed that the idea was catching on among the yeomanry to an alarming extent. Yet even within these limits there was ample room for manoeuvre. The agriculturists cried out against

extravagance, so the government scrimped and scraped to economise. They complained loud and long of "overwhelming and all-devouring taxation," so ways and means were pondered to alleviate the burden. They libelled the corn laws and the smug prosperity of the manufacturing interest, so direct assistance and better protection were items placed on the legislative agenda. At once the issue of their distress became the central issue of the session, ground fought over by an opposition scanting blood, a government anxious to please, indignant Ricardians and the representatives of the destitute themselves. With a parliament of landlords it was perhaps an inevitable pattern.

The work of retrenchment began when the old session had barely concluded. One of the last acts of the House of Commons had been to pass an address to the Crown demanding "a minute inquiry into the several departments of the Civil Government" and "every possible saving ... more especially in the Military expenditure,"¹ and charged in this manner the ministers regarded economising as one of their first priorities. Sometime during July "the paring committee" produced a plan for reducing the army by 12,000, a cut equal to any since the post-war disbandments and urged in spite of past warnings from the Horse Guards that the peace establishment had already reached its absolute minimum. Notwithstanding, the Commander-in-Chief did not flinch and as usual announced himself perfectly ready to take drastic action if the politicians deemed it necessary. Indeed, he actually went one better than they did, proposing a reduction of 15,000 by demolishing completely ten infantry and two cavalry regiments, and the only discussion that took place was over the advisability of keeping reduced battalions or a lesser number at full strength. Eventually the decision was made in favour of the former. Two cavalry regiments were

1 CJ, lxxvi.478-9.

broken, but throughout the rest of the army, in accordance with Wellington's view that "weak regiments, for internal service, are nearly as efficient as strong ones," the reductions were made in troops and companies. Altogether more than 12,000 officers and men were to be taken from the establishment at an estimated saving, when commissariat, barracks and so on were taken into account, of just over £1,000,000. With the navy undergoing a similarly harsh scrutiny, before the King departed for Ireland the government found itself able to promise economies totalling close on £1,600,000, the sort of amount, the ministers explained, which "the most reasonable and moderate of their supporters look to."¹

Even so, these imposing plans did not pass without a hitch. The outbreak of disorder in Ireland, amounting to near rebellion in the west, caught the imperial government largely unawares, mainly thanks to the Chief Secretary's failure to apply the civil power Peel had built up for precisely such an emergency, and in response to repeated calls for military assistance from Dublin Great Britain had to ship over more troops than she could safely spare. As the Duke of York moaned, all the country had left were four cavalry regiments "dispersed from the Trent to the North of Scotland" and four of infantry, "scarcely sufficient to protect the Public Stores." Almost at once, he went so far as to demand an augmentation of five or six thousand and launched a fierce attack on the whole policy of imperial defence: "The fair Question," he wrote in a memorandum submitted to the government, "and that which should be boldly put and faced is, whether the present times and the general state of The Country, viewed either in its Domestic or its Foreign Policy and Contingencies, are such as to admit of this

1 Bathurst, pp.504, 505, 506; Goulburn to Lord Bathurst, 27 July 1821, Bathurst MSS; George IV. ii.449-52.

Country continuing with a Military Establishment which proves wholly inadequate to the common Exigencies of The State, which affords no Resource applicable to extraordinary Exigencies, and which so often as it has been resorted to, has been productive of disappointment, and has sooner or later forced into use, arrangements of a temporary Character, entailing more Expence than permanent Establishments"¹ Despite this outburst the ministers refused to concede to the panic of the moment. Both Liverpool and Londonderry "agreed that it would not do to tread back our steps as to any of the permanent reductions," and Lord Talbot, the Lord Lieutenant, anticipated their views nicely by calling out three battalions of out-pensioners. In vain Wellington urged his colleagues to reform the two cavalry regiments recently disbanded. "Our Parliamentary Campaign," Londonderry explained, "perhaps our moral Influence to carry the Country thro' Its difficulties, depends on having good ground to stand on in our Military reductions. It can afford any Temporary Effort, which Internal safety and Tranquillity may require, if you take It on grounds of Temporary Policy & upon a Case made out Were we upon the present Irish Alarm ... to rescind our decision of July ... We should shake all Confidence and be supposed to have been looking out for an Excuse to Mobilize a feeling which is already imputed to the Horse Guards, of wishing to Keep up Cavalry beyond the Wants of the Country at least beyond its Means"² As a result, when the estimates were presented to parliament the country gentlemen still found them remarkably pleasant reading. The charge for

1 Memorandum by the Duke of York, 15 November 1821, Add. MSS. 38370, ff.39-49.

2 Duke of Wellington to Lord Sidmouth, 4 December 1821, Lord Liverpool to Lord Sidmouth, 10 December 1821, Lord Sidmouth to Lord Londonderry, 18 December 1821, Lord Londonderry to Lord Sidmouth, 19 December /1821/, Sidmouth MSS; Lord Sidmouth to Lord Liverpool, 9 December 1821, Add. MSS. 38290, ff.135-8.

the land forces and the navy afloat - that is, the cost of troops and seamen actively employed - was down £584,000; the ordinaries of the three services, which included "the dead expense" of half pay and pensions which always mounted with reductions, showed a saving of £146,000; and most gratifying of all, the extraordinaries in spite of the Irish emergency had been cut back over £1,000,000. All in all, Londonderry proudly claimed, the estimates had been pruned by little short of two millions.¹

Nevertheless, the ministers fully realised that to the country gentlemen's way of thinking this was only tackling half the problem. While a large army, even a large navy represented a system of extravagance only sustained by feeding the huge maw of the Exchequer, thereby hung another tale of the increasing influence of the Crown of which parliament at all times ought to have a constitutional jealousy. Everyone, of course, except the most diehard Radical, accepted that a certain influence was a political necessity while few seriously pretended that an exigency existed which cried out for another Dunning. But as long as the country remained morbidly preoccupied with the danger of corruption the House of Commons felt honour bound to investigate the position once in a while at least. Hence the report on sinecures from a select committee in 1817. Hence

- 1 Hansard, 2nd ser., vi.365-6. It is interesting to compare the "proposed reductions" of July 1821 with the estimates finally presented. The increase in the barracks estimate can be fairly attributed to the reinforcement of the Irish garrison.

	Proposed reductions (£)	1822 estimates (£)	
Navy	500,000	576,730	reduction
Army	450,000	540,900	"
Commissariat	77,000	57,511	"
Barracks	53,000	18,052	increase
Extraordinaries	200,000	300,000	reduction
Ordnance	60,000	83,000	"
Miscellaneous	250,000	190,000	"

also the insistence on "a minute inquiry into the several departments of the Civil Government" in 1821. Naturally, in matters of this sort it was up to the Treasury to take the initiative and set an example which the rest of the administration might follow, though as always sooner or later it could expect to run slap into some departmental obstruction. On this occasion a minute of 10 August 1821 set the pace. The implication of the Commons' address of June was that the number and expense of the establishments should be reduced as nearly as possible to that pertaining before the war, or to be precise, in 1797; and having revised the offices under their control according to this principle the Lords of the Treasury instructed forty-four other heads of departments to show the same willing spirit.¹ Together with a plan of compulsory superannuation and new salary regulations, the ministers spoke later of gaining something between £250,000 and £300,000 by these economies, not less than £150,000 from the reductions themselves.² Even so, it was not all plain sailing. The Marquis of Camden, one of the Tellers of the Exchequer, for instance, claimed that his office was exempt from Treasury regulation, and Sidmouth was punctilious to the point of reporting his reductions to the King-in-Council.³ But these resentments and formalities really made little difference. In the final analysis it was impossible to mislead or trifle with parliament because since 1810 the government had had a statutory obligation to provide annual returns of the increase and decrease of establishments and emoluments. Indeed, the figures show that where Pitt paddled delicately the administrations of the early nineteenth century took a headlong plunge. In June 1822 Arbuthnot drew up a memorandum for Londonderry in which he studiously summarised the

1 PP, 1822, xvii.3-9.

2 Hansard, 2nd ser., vi.1025-6, vii.1305.

3 PP, 1822, xvii.91, xviii.145-55.

achievements of forty years of economical reform. Since 1782, he claimed, relying on George Rose's Observations respecting the Public Expenditure for the earlier period, over two thousand offices had been abolished or consolidated, eighteen hundred since 1810 alone including 94 sinecures half of which were tenable with a seat in parliament. Furthermore, he estimated the total saving to the public in the last dozen years at £580,000, almost three times as much as in the previous thirty.¹ And now in one sweep the government was arranging a reduction probably equal if not surpassing those of a whole first generation of reform. Little wonder, then, that the Radical picture of ministerial influence as a hydra against which reformer heroes battled in vain was never taken for genuine by the country gentlemen or anyone else who examined the facts. When a report was laid on the table in July 1822 probably only Hume and the rest of "the Democrats" were surprised to find that roughly two-thirds of the placemen in the House of Commons held efficient offices.²

The logical consequence of economical reform, one which the petitions of irate agriculturists never ceased pointing out, was the remission of taxes, and because the expectation existed so strongly it was quite impossible for the government not to

- 1 Memorandum of the Reductions made in the Public Departments, 13 June 1822, Add. MSS. 38761, ff.24-35, 37-8. The copy in Castlereagh MSS, xxvii.631-56 is endorsed: "Prepared for Lord Londonderry's use upon Mr. Brougham's Motion on the Influence of the Crown - Arbuthnot".
- 2 On 8 June 1821 the House of Commons ordered a return of members who were placemen and pensioners, and a select committee made a report thereon in 1822. PP, 1822, iv.41-59. The appendix listed 89 names but as some of the offices were honorary rather than remunerative (aides-de-camp and K.C's were included) the actual number of "ministerial dependents" was nearer 80, less than 70 if appointments for life are disregarded. Of these probably little over 50 could be described as "efficient." Londonderry himself said that "he could not find more than seven or eight and forty persons sitting in that House who held offices under the Crown, in a sense to which influence

make some substantial gesture. Nevertheless, Vansittart and Liverpool were no more generous than they had to be. The Treasury's thinking was still ruled by an obsession with the sinking fund as the bastion of financial confidence, and inasmuch as the requisite surplus of £5,000,000 had never once been achieved in the three years since it was prescribed, to succumb to the panic of the moment and throw away revenue indiscriminately seemed cowardly and foolhardy to the first degree. Of the whole Cabinet only Williams-Wynn, who had no share in the decision of 1819 anyway, was ready to defy the monied interest to the extent of suspending or slowing redemption of the public debt.¹ The rest clung stubbornly to the old notion that the sinking fund was workable and that it must be made to work. "In endeavouring to perpetuate the system of an adequate sinking fund ... I feel that I have had a sacred cause to defend - I feel that I have been treading on consecrated ground," one of their number once declared.² In their view, if the essential surplus was ever going to be obtained, any reduction in the revenue would have to be matched by a compensating reduction in the expenditure, the underlying assumption being that the increasing yield of the taxes as indicated by the excise returns - "the great barometer of consumption" - would wholly make good the disappointing performances of previous years. At first, an arrangement along these lines seemed barely feasible. Partly the problem was to find something which would be a definite sop to the clamouring agriculturists, partly to make an effective contribution to the relief of the situation while about it.

could be fairly attached." Hansard, 2nd ser., vii.1303. It is interesting to note how a list in the Horries Papers endorses these figures: 50 "efficient" placemen, and 81 army and naval officers as against 79 given in the parliamentary return.

1 Buckingham, George IV, i.283; Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, /31 January/, 4 February 1822, Coed-y-naen MSS.

2 Hansard, 2nd ser., vi.397.

Every minister knew in his own heart that were the government to remove £4,000,000 of taxes as the Radicals wanted, it would make little difference simply because agricultural distress was the result of circumstances beyond any government's control, a fundamental maladjustment both at home and abroad of supply and demand. The most anybody could do, they believed, and then without a firm guarantee of success, was to improvise some form of mild economic stimulant. Londonderry spoke for all of his colleagues when he saw "the true source of the farmer's hope" in "the hand of Providence," "the due course of nature," "the uncontrollable operation of all those great laws and principles which govern the markets of the world."¹ For a time the ministers toyed with the idea of scrapping most of the window tax to give "an immediate & general Relief ... particularly to Country Gentlemen of Small Incomes & to Ireland," but as Williams-Wynn pointed out even this "would apply more efficaciously to the towns than to the country," and half despairing the government was tempted to turn to Bathurst's brainchild which was for direct assistance by way of loans to landed proprietors.² In the end a bit of everything was tried. Especially to mollify the landed interest, the farmers' bete noir - the tax on malt - which had been largely removed in 1816 and partially restored in 1819, was again put aside for reduction while, better late than never, a hard look at the corn laws was also proposed. To satisfy the government's reflationary plans, "an extension of the currency" Vansittart called them, the Cabinet agreed to borrow £4,000,000 from the Bank and use a portion of the sum for advances to parish vestries on security of the rates, much as the manufacturers had been assisted a few years previously.

1 Ibid., 363-4.

2 Memorandum (probably in Vansittart's hand), January 1822, Vansittart to Lord Liverpool, 22 January 1822, Castlereagh MSS, xxxvii.301-10, 335-49; Buckingham, George IV, 1.279-80, 283.

Of course, there was method in the government's madness, if madness it was to increase the unfunded debt and throw away £1,400,000 in taxation. On the one hand, remembering that impressions probably count for more than facts in politics, the need to keep somewhat in step with the fallacies of public opinion was absolute. Precisely because people believed that fewer taxes would bring material relief and that politicians were a rapacious, corrupt breed it made sense to remove a much detested impost and announce a ten per cent cut in official salaries. On the other hand, it made still greater sense to regard both as sauce for the pudding proper. As the ministers realised only too well, the farmers would have been able to tide over a difficult period much more easily had they not been facing a situation of credit starvation. It was not that there was not plenty of money about. Idle capital was actually in great abundance; the government's demands on the money market had been minimal for many years, canals, enclosures and foreign trade formed a limited field for investment and a sharp decline in prices meant a smaller circulation sufficed to finance a given turnover of goods and services. The great problem was to get this capital moving, particularly to give relief to the land. When year after year the farmer faced the dreary prospect of an unarrested price fall, he had no inducement to borrow except to make ends meet; and then his bank had no great inducement to lend. To make matters worse, coincidental with the agricultural depression, the country banks were pursuing a deliberate policy of credit contraction for other reasons. Ever since "Peel's Act" had passed - the title was reprobatory in its origins - the financial world had become hypnotised by the quantity theory of money which lay behind it. Brutal deflation, by curtailing the Bank of England's advances to the government, by steadily reducing note issues, was regarded as an essential

precondition for getting the exchanges back to par and gold back to mint price, and if anything the law's stated intention to replace small notes with gold after the completion of resumption only added to the misery. Even a rough guess as to how much the circulation was affected is well nigh impossible, mainly because no one can tell to what extent cheques and other substitutes for "money" were coming into use, but the government instinctively suspected the truth and sought to take appropriate action. Londonderry, for instance, was quite positive that "the country bankers are not acting even up to the natural scale of the credit to which the property they possess entitles them," and Liverpool described his financial measures in the Lords as being designed "to extend and quicken the general circulation."¹

Cheaper credit, then, was the government's prescription for effective relief. How to cheapen it was its pre-occupation throughout the fortnight of Cabinet deliberation which always preceded the meeting of parliament. From the outset Vansittart was keen to find some way of converting the five per cents into four per cents, and since this would kill two birds with one stone it was all along the most favoured plan; not only would the charge of the debt be reduced thus permitting an equivalent remission of revenue but interest rates in general would be encouraged to fall by reducing the stock bearing the highest interest. The great difficulty was to engineer a rise in the already high funds to make it a feasible operation. Vansittart was confident that this could be done by inflating a little; borrowing £3,000,000 from the Bank for the year's supply and advancing £4,000,000 or £5,000,000 to the landed

1 Hansard, 2nd ser., vi.716, vii.153. See also Vansittart's statement "that the best relief which could be afforded to the distresses complained of would be, an extension of the currency of the country" and "that one of the most efficient means of relieving the landed interest was the facility of borrowing money at a moderate rate of interest." Ibid., vi.71, 74.

interest in Exchequer bills to provide relief where it was most wanted.¹ Indeed, provided the latter plan made money available at a reasonable rate, there would be a further incentive for mortgages and other long-term loans to continue their downward trend. There were hitches however, hitches which always existed at this time whenever the government launched full-scale expeditions out of the realm of laissez-faire economics. The Bank directors, despite their obsession with laying up treasure in preparation for resuming cash payments, were willing enough to lend, though only on condition that the money could be called back at short notice, but as Williams-Wynn observed "with the present superabundance of capital in the market" a few millions was merely a drop in the ocean² and a worthwhile inflation really depended on whether the loan to the landed interest also went through. Here lay the rub. In the first place, the whole Cabinet, apart from Harrowby and Bathurst, were now stout adherents of the quantity theory and automatically looked askance at a substantial issue of paper which to their mind would bring down the exchanges and put off yet again the golden day of actual resumption. In the second, there were the inevitable legal and administrative intricacies involved in lending aid to private concerns. To whom was the money to be advanced? If to the occupiers the plan was bedevilled by the "multiplicity and complexity of transactions," if to the proprietors the government had the option of becoming mortgagee for most of the private property in the kingdom or making invidious distinctions between one class and another. How was security to be arranged? With the commercial and manufacturing interest there was a "great tangible property to be pledged" but more often than not

1 Vansittart to Lord Liverpool, 21 January 1822, Castlereagh MSS, xxxvii.335-49.

2 Buckingham, George IV, i.282.

the landed proprietor could only offer an estate loaded with encumbrances and settlements and the occupier the produce off his fields. Who was to disburse the loans? Crown commissioners might, as in the past, have an overall superintendence but if assistance was to be given safely and profitably some degree of local knowledge was essential. Who had that information and also the necessary impartiality?¹ All these considerations greatly cramped the government's initiative. Indeed, at one stage the whole idea of issuing Exchequer bills to succour agriculture was nearly dropped, which left the inflationists nothing except the Bank loan to fall back on,² and when an approach to the country bankers was decided it met with a stinging rebuff from "the impossibility on the part of the farmers to offer sufficient security."³ By this time with parliament impatient to hear from the government the most that could be managed was a scheme of parochial loans to be provided out of £4,000,000 advanced by the Bank. On application to commissioners appointed by the Crown parish vestries could receive an amount not exceeding one year's assessment of the parochial rates to be employed for "corporate purposes" and repaid in instalments over a period of four or five years. Nevertheless, no doubt Vansittart and those who thought like him consoled themselves that something was better than nothing, even though the relief was administered in a very indirect sort of way.

- 1 Vansittart to Lord Liverpool, 21 January 1822, Castleroagh MSS, xxxvii.335-49 is an interesting resume of the difficulties.
- 2 Buckingham, George IV, i.283; Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, /31 January 1822/, Coed-y-maen MSS.
- 3 Liverpool and Vansittart met several London bankers, including the Governor and Deputy Governor of the Bank of England, on 4 February 1822. The Times, 5 February 1822. Though the next day in the Lords the Prime Minister positively denied that he had proposed to issue Exchequer bills through the country banks it is obvious that he was sounding out opinion in the financial world. Hansard, 2nd ser., vi.16.

Possibly there was reason to hope that where the government left off others would carry on, that with this little lubricant the wheels of the economy would gradually pick up speed and build a mighty momentum. Certainly in deliberately trying to induce an expansion of credit, and in going to great pains in the process, the ministers displayed a peculiarly modern grasp of the situation and it is indeed interesting that Vansittart, whom it has always been fashionable to deride, may have been leading his colleagues. The oft-heard accusation that Liverpool's administration wandered aimlessly in a torpor of financial unimaginativeness unquestionably deserves serious reappraisal.

Once their financial preparations were complete the ministers could feel in all honesty that they had done their utmost to be true to both popular expectations and their own convictions: they had shaved the estimates as far as they dared, they were ready to deliver up a million and a half of revenue; yet they stuck to the principle of a sinking fund nourished on an annual surplus and engaged themselves to relieve the country by a considerable addition to the unfunded debt. It remained to be seen whether parliament would endorse or refute these seeming contradictions. According to Williams-Wynn the only measure of relief that would be "comprehensible" to the Commons was a much greater reduction of taxation than the government was inclined to propose,¹ but as things turned out the first fortnight of the session proved him wrong and his colleagues right. On the opening day (5 February) Brougham and Londonderry both promised to tackle the problem of distress either that week or the one following, and though Hume in default of a party amendment at once raised the issue of "excessive taxation" ministers and members preferred to look forward to

1 Buckingham, George IV, 1.283; Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, /31 January/, 4 February 1822, Coed-y-maon MSS.

these two motions as the acid test of parliamentary confidence. Even so, Hume's brief sortie left the government none too confident of the outcome, for a handful of country gentlemen, notably including Lethbridge of Somersetshire, had hastened to join him despite Londonderry's pleas that the ministers should be allowed a fair hearing before judgement was passed. "The country gentlemen seem all very much for taking off taxes & putting an end to the sinking fund" was Arbuthnot's grim impression,¹ and the Prime Minister, whose habitual pessimism already led him to expect the worst, quickly made up his mind to do or die in the attempt to save the public credit. "L^{iverpool}," Huskisson reported, "appears quite determined to stand or fall with that Fund, & told me yesterday that it was the measure of all others in the defence of which He should be best satisfied to close his political existence; only reserving the discretion to retire if defeated in the first onset or to continue the fight with greater tenacity, according to circumstances."² As it happened, there was never a need to go the whole hog. "The Boodle Cabinet," that is to say the country gentlemen, decided in fair play to oppose Brougham's motion, which was to come on first, to give the government an opportunity to state its case, and learning this the ministers agreed to enter into their feelings as much as possible by preferring the previous question to a direct negative.³ These tactics appeared to pay off handsomely. Londonderry countered a masterly speech of Brougham's, which had ended in a demand for "such a reduction of the Taxes as may be suited to the change in the value of money, and may afford an immediate relief," with a vehement charge that he had attempted to "entrap the House

1 Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1.140.

2 Huskisson to Canning, /2/, /8 February 1822/ Canning MSS. Lord Londonderry was of a like disposition. Mrs. Arbuthnot, 1.140.

3 Huskisson to Canning, /11 February 1822/, Canning MSS.

into a premature decision" before the subject was fully before it, and much to his relief he gained for himself a comfortable hundred majority.¹ As an expression of confidence, of course, it was far from being unambiguous, but at least it showed that the country gentlemen were keeping their own counsel and would not be taken for a ride by the Whigs.

Still, the opposition were not prepared to give up this easily. They continued to believe that the government's financial policy was where its chief vulnerability lay, that inasmuch as public opinion imagined taxation to be the principal cause of distress sooner or later parliament would have to pretend it knew no better. The country gentlemen for certain were anything but stouthearted. Even Londonderry was driven to admit that every once in a while they voted "to make a figure in the columns of the opposition papers & please their constituents,"² and on this occasion a few deft strokes aimed at the sinking fund or particularly obnoxious taxes could easily do the government serious harm with always a chance of mortal injury. No sooner, therefore, had Londonderry made his resume of the government's relief programme than Althorp brought forward a motion to the effect "that the Reduction in the amount of Taxation proposed by His Majesty's Ministers is not sufficient to satisfy the just expectations of the people." Naturally, each side invoked the same old arguments. The Whigs insisted that Vansittart had made a mockery of Pitt's sinking fund and that it would be far better to abandon the idea of a surplus in order to give an immediate and wide-ranging relief: Tierney in particular accused the ministers of having an eye for the fundholder's interest when nothing stood between the country and a prosperity which would content all parties except ruinous taxa-

1 Hansard, 2nd ser., vi.220-78.

2 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.147.

tion. In reply the government laughed at the opposition's ingenuousness: they were prepared to retrench, they were prepared to give away taxes when they could properly afford it, but all the fine promises in the world could not detract from their awesome responsibility to maintain the public credit of which the sinking fund, however imperfect hitherto, was the great bastion.¹ That this was the decisive debate on the issue there can be no doubt. Already the country gentlemen had been agreeably impressed by the proposals set forth by Londonderry² and a further majority in excess of a hundred, including some who had voted with Brougham, drove the point home that they willingly bowed to the government's greater wisdom. Four days later Vansittart expounded his plan for the conversion of the five per cents to an amiable House³ and the ministers sat back to congratulate themselves that the worst was behind them. Little did they know that their agony was only beginning.

The first signs of trouble came later the same week when Calcraft renewed his efforts to obtain a repeal, this time a gradual repeal, of the duties on salt. It was an exceptionally clever move. Inevitably the government argued that since the House had already pledged itself to a £5,000,000 surplus⁴ the opposition was beguiling it into a dangerous inconsistency, but the country gentlemen were strongly tempted to forget their good resolutions by the hatefulness of the tax - a select committee in 1818 found that its removal "would be productive of the greatest and most important advantages to all descrip-

1 Hansard, 2nd ser., vi.558-609.

2 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.144.

3 George IV, ii.502.

4 As an alternative to Lord Althorp's resolution on 21 February the government had moved that a surplus of £5,260,000 was estimated for the current financial year.

tions of persons"¹ - and also by what the Treasury bench called a crooked notion that the ministers could be blackmailed into further economies. Vansittart's expostulation that the loss of £500,000 from the revenue would jeopardise his conversion operation and Londonderry's that the sinking fund was being staked for "premature or speculative retrenchments" availed nothing. Well over thirty independents, most probably out to cut a dash with their constituents or impress on the ministers the seriousness of the situation, converged on the opposition side to give the government a meagre majority of four.² "All this lowers the Government in public estimation & gives an idea of weakness which we do not deserve," wailed Mrs. Arbuthnot.³ Worse, it seemed to inspire the Whigs onto the right track at precisely the right moment. During Calcraft's debate many country gentlemen had declaimed along with Knatchbull, the member for Kent, that "ministers could effect further retrenchments to meet their diminished income," and, as the government's luck would have it, their adversaries smartly perceived here a new line of attack. The day following Ridley in the committee of supply moved for the third time since 1817 the reduction of two commissioners from the Admiralty Board, this time to find his persistence rewarded by a majority of fifty-four, the biggest winning margin the opposition had enjoyed for years. Not surprisingly, the order book was filled with similar "economical" motions in a matter of days. Lord Normanby gave notice of one on the postmaster-general's office, Creevey another on the Board of Control, Althorp yet a third, and most of the agricultural taxes were down for discussion to boot.⁴ Even so, the ministers,

1 PP, 1818, v.346.

2 Hansard, 2nd ser., vi.837-62.

3 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.146.

4 Buckingham, George IV, i.295.

inured as they were to the country gentlemen's little caprices, took a remarkably philosophical view of what was going on. Buckingham, who was more often wrong than right when it came to politics, got it into his head that the government ought to resign to give the country a taste of the villainous Whigs,¹ but those in the Cabinet found such a drastic step as unnecessary as it was undesirable. Londonderry regarded the behaviour of the country gentlemen as a nuisance rather than a threat: as he saw it, no principle of the influence allowable to an administration in the Commons had been impugned by the successful attack on the Admiralty Board and an occasional embarrassment on a point of detail was something every government had to learn to live with.² A real danger developed only when the "moral influence" of government was weakened by a string of consecutive or near consecutive defeats, enforcing in the end a crucial test of confidence. Wellington, to be sure, was inclined to believe this moment was not too far away. While he dismissed recent setbacks as the result of the country gentlemen finding themselves "obliged to follow the torrent rather than stem it" he also feared that they were learning a habit of constant opposition which could bring the government to its knees before the session closed with dire consequences for the whole nation.³ But only he, it seemed, felt the rot had set in as much as this. Not once, even while the opposition was applying maximum pressure, did the ministers apply to the House for a new lease of confidence. Instead, the most the Treasury felt called upon to do was send out notes urging attendance on certain members to defend "the just and necessary influence of the Crown" against an

1 Duke of Buckingham to Thomas Grenville, 5 March 1822, Grenville MSS; Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.150.

2 Ibid., pp.146-7.

3 Wellington Desp. (new series), i.219-20.

opposition "determined to break down the means of administering the affairs of the country,"¹ and that it had calculated aright in withholding the ultimate deterrent was amply borne out in the contest which followed. Normanby's notion to vest the postmaster-generalship in one man not two was lost by twenty-five votes; Creevey's the next day for a select committee to investigate the Board of Control crashed by little short of two hundred; and since it was obvious that no profit could come of further discussion the remainder were tactfully dropped. Thereafter, even the estimates sped through the House with little molestation. One member spoke of them getting through "with fewer delays and remarks of Hume than was expected" and Londonderry, who had hoped to have all but the miscellaneous services provided for before Easter, was much gratified to find this deadline near enough fulfilled.² Once again the government had successfully endured a passing spasm of displeasure on the part of the country gentlemen, and this time without conceding a moral victory to the Whigs by making the issue a question of confidence.

Unbeknown to the ministers, their real troubles were only just beginning, though it is hard not to believe that some at least more than half suspected as much. In the main, all parties measured the distress of agriculture by the price of corn calculated by the Receiver of Corn Returns and as this, thanks to a "genial spring," showed a continuing downward trend - the wheat average from March to May was 45s.2d. compared with 49s.0d. for the previous quarter³ - there was every reason to expect a further display of bad temper from peevish country gentlemen after the Easter holidays. Moreover, it was becoming

1 Mrs. Arbuthnot, ii.449.

2 Colchester, iii.250; George IV, ii.520.

3 PP, 1825, xx.231.

increasingly clear that there existed a hard core of recalcitrants to deal with. Earlier on Wellington had accused "the Booodle set" of acting in concert but only now after constant battles in the agricultural committee and on the floor of the House were the consistent opposers on questions of taxation and economical reform earning a notoriety of their own. Undoubtedly the chief culprit in the government's eyes was Sir Thomas Lethbridge, and backing him there may have been twenty or even thirty others, many of whom represented agricultural counties like Lethbridge himself. With irregulars like this ready to take the ministerial army in the rear, ready too to egg others on to join them, Londonderry and his colleagues fully appreciated the need for further appeasement. The problem was that there was little left to try. After seven years of rigorous economy not much could be gleaned from the establishments, the sinking fund was inviolable and so therefore the revenue which supported it, and that the corn laws were a hornets' nest a government was mad to disturb was obvious from the heated discussions already distinguishing the agricultural committee. This time the barrel of expedients was really scraped to the bottom. As was expected, after the pitiless economies planned during the prorogation not a penny more could be squeezed from the estimates in the immediate future. A few weeks previously Londonderry and the Prime Minister had gone down to Brighton to deprive the civil list of £30,000 and having accomplished that - the King referring to the agreed reduction in official salaries said "as a gentleman he could not do less himself than he had imposed upon his servants"¹ - the government had exhausted all it was sane to attempt. Yet fortunately once again a little

1 Arbuthnot, pp.29-30; Bathurst, p.529; Wellington and his Friends (ed. Duke of Wellington), pp.20-1; Mrs. Arbuthnot, 149-50.

financial ingenuity saved the day. Since the committee sitting on agricultural distress had looked askance at the Cabinet's plan of parochial loans, a decision was taken to make £1,000,000 available to farmers warehousing their corn under the king's lock instead. To assist the inflation still further, another £1,000,000, also part of the sum the Bank had promised earlier, was assigned for poor relief in Ireland, and the country banks, who had been steadily contracting their issues in anticipation of the expiry of their note-issuing authority, were given an extended term to circulate paper of £1 denomination. Without question, the ministers took the first and last of these decisions with not a little bravado. Where public money for public works had a firm precedent in the crisis of 1817, only a few weeks before Londonderry had complained that "lending money on the produce of the land" involved "so great a multiplicity and complexity of transactions, that the execution of it would become impracticable,"¹ and to authorise five hundred different banks in one sweep to issue legal tender was enough to give any believer in the quantity theory nightmares of falling exchanges and a rush towards gold. Yet this was by no means the limit of the government's daring, for one other expedient in a very unobtrusive sort of way contradicted much that had already been heard in defence of keeping a sinking fund. That expedient concerned the annual charge of roughly £5,000,000 for military and naval half-pay, "the dead expense" as Londonderry called it, "the Deadweight" as Cobbett named it for posterity. After discussion on the constitutional points arising - the Crown had to be kept as paymaster though parliament lost its annual cognizance - the government proposed to convert this portion of the estimates into a fixed annuity of £2,500,000, selling it to contractors who throughout a forty-five year period would be

1 Hansard, 2nd ser., vi.385-6.

obliged to provide the whole but a steadily diminishing sum as death overtook the beneficiaries. Since this in effect was a form of loan to be repaid a generation later, a loan moreover which disguised the real extent of the annual surplus, it was fair to argue, as many on the opposition side did, that the ministers had departed from the sinking fund's basic premise of public credit sustained by continuing redemption of the national debt.¹ Still, the particular sin was a venial one and as far as the sinners were concerned it was a sin in aid of the good work of further tax reductions. With between £1,800,000 and £1,900,000 to spare, so the Cabinet calculated after some complicated arithmetic on the statistics of survival, the government could safely prepare for the repeal of the salt duty and the diminution of the window tax sometime during the next session, promising the same in general terms immediately after the Easter recess.²

Financial measures such as the ministers were willing to propose sprung largely from a feeling of impotence before the inexorable laws of the economic universe; a little good might be done, a little palliative might be administered but without getting to the root of the disorder or effecting a lasting cure. Exactly the same attitude prevailed concerning

- 1 See Williams-Wynn's comment, Buckingham, George IV. 1.290: "... I must say for those who support /the sinking fund/ it is somewhat ridiculous with one hand to expend five millions in relief of the burthens of posterity, and with the other to transpose a burthen from our own shoulders upon theirs." According to an opposition member for the first sixteen years the state would contribute £42,000,000 and the contractors £63,000,000 while for the remaining twenty-nine the respective payments would total £84,000,000 and £39,000,000. Hansard, 2nd ser., vii.285.
- 2 Towards the end of February Vansittart confided to Williams-Wynn that salt and windows were on his list of priorities for taxation relief. Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 25 February 1822, Coed-y-maen MSS.

the corn laws. Just as fiscal relief could never set agriculture to rights, so recasting the Act of 1815 could offer nothing for the country gentlemen's present satisfaction. Indeed, it was not extravagant to argue that reducing the tax bill according to the demands of "the agriculturasses" had more purpose than enforcing an absolute prohibition of foreign corn also demanded, for the one at least went some way towards stimulating consumer spending while the other simply legislated what was already an existing fact - since 1820 the ports had been closed, and seemed likely to continue closed for some time to come, yet the condition of agriculture had worsened rather than improved. Two committees of the House of Commons sat on the corn laws in 1821 and 1822 but both frankly admitted that extending the eighty shilling prohibition was a pointless exercise. The only consolation the first had been able to offer the landed interest was that "there is a natural tendency in the distribution of capital and labour to remedy the disorders which may casually arise" and its successor bluntly drew the obvious conclusion that "little prospect of immediate relief can be held out."¹ Moreover, by 1822 public opinion was coming to realise as much. Perhaps to emphasise that the government had been right all along, Londonderry readily attributed its enlightenment to the report largely written by Huskisson the previous year. That report, he claimed in parliament, had "had a most important and salutary effect on the public mind, by leading it to take more just and temperate views. I believe," he went on, "that the period of delusion has now, in a great measure, passed by. I believe that sounder doctrines than those which were last year promulgated, have become generally prevalent."² Whether or not the government was blowing its own trumpet, this disposal

1 PP, 1821, ix.7; 1822, v.5.

2 Hansard, 2nd ser., vi.389.

of the champions of absolute monopoly did mean that there was one less reason for tinkering with the Act of 1815. There was some point in surrendering something to the popular misconception that the removal of taxes would cure the country's economic ills: where people did not pretend to know any better than the government there was none.

Why then did the ministers propose a radical reconstruction of the corn law in 1822? For years they had refused to alter what the agriculturists themselves had originally pronounced acceptable and which had in fact worked, assuming protection from foreign competition in years of plenty to have been the bill's great object. Admittedly one serious defect stood out inasmuch as absolute prohibition could be translated overnight into unlimited importation by the opening of the ports. But since it had always existed why suddenly decide to tackle it now? There can be little doubt that the ministers were impelled towards the undesirable - the undesirable because no one wanted a repeat performance of the ugly scenes of 1815 - mainly by the whiplash of the country gentlemen's growing displeasure. All the evidence indicates that they were contemplating sweeping changes well before the commencement of the parliamentary session. A memorandum among the Castlereagh papers, possibly in Vansittart's hand, of "measures to be considered" includes a proposal to reduce the foreign import price to 67s. a quarter with a duty of 20s. gradually decreasing to 10s. over a ten year period, and in the discussion which ensued the Cabinet apparently resolved to recommend free importation above 95s. or 100s. and prohibition at 60s. or 70s. with a sliding scale of duties to regulate the transition in between.¹ However, this

1 /Memorandum/, January 1822, Castlereagh MSS, xxxvii.301-10; Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 4 February 1822, Coed-y-maen MSS.

preference was not mentioned to the Commons immediately. Londonderry chose instead, despite insinuations that the government was again throwing dust in the eyes of the country gentlemen, to give a hint of the way his colleagues were thinking and lie the whole question before another select committee.¹ The main object now became to achieve something substantial, to avoid accusations which one prominent country member had made of producing "a piece of mystification,"² and if any incentive was needed the deteriorating situation in parliament surely provided it. Londonderry himself became chairman of the inquiry, no doubt intentionally for the government's control of proceedings was thereby strengthened. Apart from him in a committee eventually numbering thirty-eight there were half a dozen government men, almost as many Whigs and nineteen who were dyed-in-the-wool agriculturists, which hardly gave the ministers a commanding position. Nevertheless, on only two points did they succumb, neither directly concerning the corn laws; the loans to parishes on security of the parochial rates were thrown out and a plan to advance money for warehoused corn was brought forward as an alternative. As for the suggestion earlier propounded by Londonderry of "a moderate scale of duty ... to render the supply not sudden, inordinate and overwhelming," that won triumphant acceptance though it offered nothing in the way of relief and prepared for a contingency - wheat at 80s. a quarter - which many were wont to believe would never again occur.³ But the government had struck the right track and knowing now that it might need every crumb of support it was never tempted to leave it. Londonderry spoke later of "my having received many pretty

1 See Hansard, 2nd ser., vi.388-97.

2 T.S. Cochr, the member for Suffolk, who had been chairman of the agricultural committee in 1821. Ibid., 463.

3 For the report see PP, 1822, v.3-8.

strong hints in the committee ... that it would be considered an extraordinary dereliction of public duty, if his majesty's government were to suffer such a report as the agricultural report to lie on the table of the House of Commons, without proposing to parliament the adoption of some measure founded upon it,"¹ and it is interesting to note that to keep the play in their hands it was the ministers who drafted the resolutions embodying the report's recommendations, not the committee as was usually the case. By the time parliament had straggled back after the Easter recess, then, what with plans for the farmers' future comfort and those for his present, the ministers had every reason to hope their house was proof against all weathers. The question was, though, whether a breeze or a hurricane lay in the offing.

The first ruffles came very quickly indeed. Scarcely a week after the House resumed Lord John Russell moved, as the precursor for a reform bill along moderate lines, that the state of the representation required "the most serious consideration" and though Canning was widely expected to "take the labouring oar" - and did, following the smarting humiliation over Grampound the government could never rest certain that a majority still held dear the old principles of uncompromising resistance. Thomas Grenville, presumably, was not the only one who noticed the baleful effects of Radical propaganda which was continually blaming distress on parliament's unresponsiveness and pressing the country gentlemen to accept the same hypothesis: "some who were steady anti-reformers," he reported regretfully, "have suffered themselves to be gulled by Cobbett into attributing the pressure of their rents to an inadequate representation in Parliament, though it has no more to do with their rents than with those of the Cham of Tartary."² The

1 Hansard, 2nd ser., vii.176.

2 Buckingham, George IV. i.291.

division on Russell's motion only partly confirmed these fears. The minority of 164 in support of it read much like a roll-call of the opposite side but it was at the same time the largest reform vote since Pitt's airing of the question in 1785,¹ and inasmuch as independents whose sympathies lay close to the Whigs were coming to accept the inevitability of some change the result could hardly revive the government's flagging spirits. For the moment the opposition set their house in order by making it their stated policy to extend the representation of the counties and large towns at the expense of a hundred Old Sarums the greater their chance of making inroads among respectable opinion and the greater then their chance of ultimate parliamentary success.

The real calamity of the spring session, however, befell the government exactly a week later when Lord Normanby, apparently encouraged by a popular cry against influence, renewed his attack on the jointly-held postmaster-generalship. This time Normanby tried the slightly more direct tactic of an address to the Crown and this time the ministers acted much less circumspectly. Rather than argue the constitutional function of ministerial influence, which was the only real defence they could put up, they tried to sidle round the issue by suggesting but not positively offering a parliamentary commission to investigate the office, and in disgust at this temporising with public opinion over fifty independents led by the member for Yorkshire crossed over to the opposition side. Though the difference between a government majority of twenty-five in March and a Whig majority of fifteen in May was not to be explained, as Mrs. Arbuthnot liked to explain it, by an overt act of treachery on the part of the country gentlemen,² there

1 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.159-60.

2 Ibid., p.161.

was naught for the government's comfort in such a signal embarrassment. When the fact of the matter came to be examined the assumption had to be that the floating part of the House was under increasing pressure from outside and the opposition fully alive to the advantage which beckoned. While only four voted against Normanby and then for him, about thirty independents and almost sixty Whigs who had not previously declared themselves seized the opportunity to do so now, and given this circumstance it is difficult not to accept that the country gentlemen's exasperation was increasing with that of the nation's. Certainly, Henry Bankes' comment that "these occasional defeats neither shake nor endanger the Ministers" missed the whole point of the adverse moral effect.¹ Peel was not the only one who was beginning to think the government could no longer afford to distinguish between "vital and indifferent" questions.²

The sequence of events which finally decided a vote of confidence developed during the discussions in committee of the government's plans for agricultural relief. Three days before Normanby's motion came on Lord Londonderry had announced these to the House but resolutions bringing them into actual consideration were introduced just over a week later. From the start it was obvious that the administration had sailed into troubled waters. No less than four sets of counter-resolutions were placed on the table, two from agriculturists seeking a virtual monopoly and two from "abominable" political economists - Huskisson was one, Ricardo the other - anticipating what Londonderry called "a more natural state of things."³ All and sundry

1 Colchester, iii.253.

2 Buckingham, George IV, i.326.

3 Hansard, 2nd ser., vii.400. The main difference between Huskisson and Ricardo's and the government's proposals was that they favoured a fixed duty according to price where the ministers preferred an additional duty for the first three months to guard against excessive importations.

kept up a sniping fire into the bargain. In spite of the ground won earlier in the session the old bogey of "all-devouring taxation" was again brought out, the currency fadists continued to see Peel's Act as the original great iniquity and opposition diehards took the rabble-rousing line that to remove present discontents one had only to remove the Crown's present advisers. Though in the end but two of the thirteen resolutions failed,¹ inevitably this provoking and harassing drove the government to a point where it felt compelled to ask for a further affirmation of the country gentlemen's allegiance. It was not so much that the administration stood in mortal danger as that its strength needed to be demonstrated anew. By bringing forward propositions in defiance of the King's ministers and by forcing the same to withdraw propositions of their own, Lethbridge and his cronies were ostensibly taking the part of the official opposition, which their return to the fallacy that distress was not due to "natural causes" did nothing to belie. On 9 May, therefore, the very day the agricultural resolutions were voted, the Cabinet decided in favour of a meeting of official men through whom the country gentlemen could be informed that the administration staked its existence on the next two votes of the House. That nothing could obscure the issue of confidence followed from the nature of the questions themselves, for one concerned the rank of Great Britain's representation at Berne and the other the diplomatic expense in general, in both of which matters the ministers had fully obeyed or gone beyond parliament's express injunctions.² As it turned out, the

1 That providing for loans on security of warehoused corn and that permitting the grinding of foreign corn already under bond to help off-load the country's surplus. Londonderry was particularly annoyed at having to withdraw the first, accusing the country gentlemen "who ought to regard it with parental feelings" of leaving him in the lurch. Ibid., 363-4. See also Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.161-2.

2 Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 11 May 1822, Coed-y-maen MSS; Buckingham, George IV, i.324-5; Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.162-3.

judicious choice left the government with no regrets. Common report had it, so Williams-Wynn heard, that "all the loose fish come into our net,"¹ but, notwithstanding, consecutive majorities of 127 and 106 must have been particularly gratifying on what were after all points of economical government. Certainly, the remainder of the session, which dragged on another seven weeks, petered out into a series of unexciting skirmishes. At one time the salt duties and window tax were each threatened with immediate elimination; twice Western who had a currency bee in his country gentleman's bonnet, demanded inquiry into the deflationary effect of Peel's Act; Brougham made a forlorn attempt to establish the fact of the Crown's increasing influence; and in a fitting end to the session Hume rang down the curtain with a brave and fruitless onslaught on the entire sinking fund rationale. All, of course, was much travelled terrain and not surprisingly the number of passengers got fewer and fewer. Throughout the early part of July the Irish members left in droves and the Englishmen were not slow to follow suit. As one of their number remarked a fortnight before the House rose: "Everybody but Hume and Bennett are sick to death of it, and literally every other Opposition man gone out of town."² Nevertheless, the final government ascendancy still allowed much uncomfortable rumination. The Prime Minister treated Huskisson to a long tale of woe shortly before each went their separate ways, "fully admitting that much valuable ground had been lost ... and that to concede every thing and propose nothing was a course of Administration neither creditable for the Govt, nor safe for the Country."³ Likewise the long and arduous session had taken a heavy toll of reputations and bodily

1 Buckingham, George IV. i.326.

2 Ibid., pp.340, 354.

3 Huskisson to Canning, 11 August 1822, Canning MSS.

constitutions. Vansittart's inarticulateness at a time when finance was the dominant parliamentary topic, the failure of his deadweight scheme to attract private contractors, the general air of deviousness which was now constantly surrounding him had seriously depleted his political worth; and Bragge-Bathurst, broken in body and spirit by his own ill-health and domestic afflictions, was unlikely to face another parliament.¹ But the session's main victim was one greater than either, one whom Liverpool was to describe as the administration's right arm. Overworked, overwrought, on 12 August Londonderry ended his existence with macabre surgeon's precision. It was the only, the accumulated outburst of an inordinately sensitive man.

Londonderry's suicide and the vacancies it created in the Commons and the Foreign Office never really revived the antagonisms of the past over Canning's readmission. To be sure, the King still conceived it a matter of private honour to bar the Closet door and Eldon and Sidmouth readily lent their weight, but among the other ministers who had connived to send him to India a frank acceptance of his now inestimable value replaced the former feeling that the government could manage well enough without him. Only Canning, they felt, could fill the void to anything near sufficiency. Peel, the single alternative, had undeniable talent and a rising reputation, and yet where he was in the middle of the awkward adolescence from departmental spokesman to front-bench debater, Canning was universally recognised as being at the peak of parliamentary eminence, an eminence enhanced if that were possible by his recent brilliant performances as a private member. Since Canning would never serve under Peel in the House of Commons - how could he after refusing to serve under Castlereagh in 1812? - the government's choice became in reality no choice. If the latter

1 Ibid.

was given the lead, not only would the administration be reduced to "one individual who could pretend to take a great line in Parliament," and that an individual without Londonderry's popularity and possibly stamina, but Canning's friends and the Grenvilles, who had already made complaints about his going, would leave in disgust as well, placing the government, as Wellington admitted, "in respect to parliamentary talents in a situation far inferior to that in which we had been for many years." Most of the Cabinet agreed, in fact, that the only debatable point arising from Londonderry's death related to the office Canning should hold. Generally speaking, the lead in the Commons was compatible with the Exchequer or one of the three secretaryships-of-state, though in time of peace the War and Colonies was looked upon as a distinctly lesser appointment. Everyone knew that were the choice Canning's he would leap at the chance of the Foreign Office, for he had little liking for financial subjects, took the common view that Peel's job was one of endless routine and ever rued the day he spurned Castlereagh's generous offer in July 1812. Yet a feeling existed that Wellington was the more suitable appointment. Probably the King was not alone in thinking that Castlereagh's personal diplomacy had been the foundation of Great Britain's ascendancy among the Continental powers, and as Wellington was on equally familiar terms with the crowned heads of Europe his promotion to the Foreign Office must surely have seemed the firmest guarantee of its long continuation. Moreover, there was a strong suspicion that Canning's nature contained a tactless streak, a suspicion encouraged by his quarrel with Hastings and which if right could only quicken the destruction of Castlereagh's great handiwork. When all was said and done, though, the Cabinet fully realised that Canning could demand his own price. To offend him would be to incur far too great a risk. Even

should he depart for India in consequence, his friends more than likely would go into open hostility and thereafter any change for the worse in the government's parliamentary situation might easily tempt him home to direct in person the opposition's final offensive. On reflection it also seemed that the Exchequer and the Home Office were better left alone. While Castlereagh had once described Vansittart's position as the most important in time of peace, it was difficult indeed to see how a man of Canning's restless energy could strike a working relationship with a premier much better versed in political economy than he was, and Peel with his immense knowledge of Ireland and none of Europe had a natural niche. Quite clearly, "the full inheritance" became Canning's out of convenience as much as necessity.¹

The essence of the struggle, then, was to make the King see sense. Liverpool, whose opinion of Canning's desirability had not altered one jot or tittle and who after the wrangle of the previous year could not help envisaging "a more extensive change,"² must have been astounded at his colleagues' change of heart. Wellington, Bathurst and Westmorland, all of whom thought Canning a parvenu and a shy customer, assumed his accession without a further word spoken, and Melville this time obliged by sending notice from Scotland "that he would not oppose such a proposition if others deemed it on the whole most desirable."³ Since Sidmouth could only threaten resignation from his Cabinet seat and Eldon always exaggerated his political importance, it was the King and the King alone who had to be

1 The most comprehensive ministerial statement of the reasons for appointing Canning is contained in a memorandum Wellington wrote for Londonderry's widow. See Wellington Desp. (new series), 1.277-8.

2 Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 16 August 1822, Coed-y-maen MSS; Buckingham, George IV, 1.364.

3 For the opinions of various Cabinet ministers see Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 16 August 1822, Williams-Wynn to

moved. From past experience the Prime Minister knew that this was a task others could perform better than he could, and having summoned Wellington from the Low Countries where he was inspecting the frontier fortresses, instead of sending him to the Congress at Verona in place of Castlereagh which was what he originally intended, he bade him stay home to await the King's return from Scotland.¹ What actually made Liverpool change his mind was a letter he received from the King on 20 August which left no doubts that George was again meaning to be as awkward as possible. "The immediate object of my writing to You," he was told, "is ... that You will not interrupt & on no account impede, the Arrangements which are already settled respecting India, as it is my Decision, that they should remain final & conclusive."² Arriving when this did, on the day of Londonderry's funeral as it happened, Liverpool knew precisely where he stood. Though he had promised the King in conveying to him news of the tragedy that he would do nothing to "preclude full free and unfetter'd Consideration of the Measures which it might be expedient to adopt," a promise he now repeated,³ he had already withdrawn to Coombe Wood for a few days with Lord Bathurst, Wellington and the Arbuthnots and from them he learnt that the opposition within the Cabinet would be far short of what he expected. There the two former both showed themselves willing to make over the whole inheritance, which not only

Thomas Grenville, 20 August 1822, Coed-y-maen MSS; Buckingham, George IV. i.365-6; Lord Bathurst to Lord Harrowby, 23 August 1822, Harrowby MSS. 14, f.119; Arbuthnot to Lord Liverpool, 28 August/1822/, Add. MSS. 38575, f.33; Arbuthnot, p.31; Liverpool, iii.198.

1 Williams-Wynn to Lord Grenville, 16 August 1822, Williams-Wynn to Thomas Grenville, 20 August 1822, Coed-y-maen MSS; George IV. ii.532-3, 534.

2 The King to Lord Liverpool, 17 August 1822, Add. MSS. 38190, f.56.

3 Lord Liverpool to the King, 20 August 1822, *ibid.*, 38575, f.50.

coincided with Liverpool's views but also met Canning's wishes in full as those had been made known by Huskisson's little confidences.¹ To complete the picture, the day after Wellington returned to Town he received a hardly discreet missive from the Duke of Buckingham, who without consulting Williams-Wynn or his uncles, demanded Canning's admission or an equivalent accession of "Catholics" to the Cabinet on pain of terminating his connection with the government.² With this threat, despite its clumsiness, the necessity of getting Canning was finally driven home, for if the Grenvilles left the whole political cart would become dangerously tilted. Ignoring Eldon and Sidmouth, the only man now standing in the way of a united Cabinet was Peel. As he was in Scotland with the King, his views were unknown, though George on one occasion tried to sound him out and Liverpool to wring a drop of significance out of his recurring complaints of ill health.³ True, in keeping this quiet he was only obeying the Prime Minister's particular orders, but as soon as he returned to London he would have to unburden his soul and Liverpool requested an interview at the earliest possible moment for this very purpose.⁴ Indeed, everyone appreciated that Peel's decision was crucial. Should he refuse to serve under Canning, and there were plenty like the Duke of Newcastle who would welcome it,⁵ there was little doubt that

- 1 Huskisson saw Canning on 15 August and the next day confided his terms to Croker, most likely deliberately for Croker was a notorious gossip. Croker, i.227-8. As if to make absolutely certain that the message got through not long afterwards Huskisson wrote a similar communication to Arbuthnot. Huskisson to Arbuthnot, 19, 21 August 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, ff.196-9.
- 2 Wellington Desp. (new series), i.261-2.
- 3 Liverpool, iii.195-6; Arbuthnot, p.30.
- 4 Lord Liverpool to Peel, 23 August 1822, Add. MSS. 40304, f.63.
- 5 Peel, i.330-1. See also Lord Clive to Lord Sidmouth, 22 August /1822/, Sidmouth MSS which conveys the disapprobation of Canning of Holme Sumner and T.S. Gooch, prominent country gentlemen.

the government would emerge almost as weak as if Canning had gone and he had remained. Perhaps worse, his withdrawal could spark off a run of "Protestant" resignations and see the utter ruination of Liverpool's system of "Protestant-Catholic" neutrality. It was not long before the period of suspense was over however. Leaving Edinburgh a day after the King, Peel hurried to London as fast as horses could carry him, and arriving at his house in Stanhope Street in the late afternoon of 1 September he found a note from the Prime Minister awaiting him appointing the following morning for their *tete-a-tete*.¹ At it he told Liverpool what he had already written to his closest political friends,² that he would in no case oppose what his colleagues thought best. "Peel has behaved most handsomely," Arbuthnot wrote pointedly to Lord Sidmouth. "Impressed with the benefit to be derived from Canning's Parly talents it wd be his opinion that, if the King & his own Colleagues shd consent to it, there wd be good sense in endeavouring to avail ourselves of them; & he, Peel, wd under such circumstances be quite ready to stand with respect to Canning in the same position as he stood with regard to our poor friend."³ From this moment the way was clear for a straightforward confrontation with the King.

It must be admitted that the ministers had few doubts about what the result would be. Though George was capable of extraordinary vindictiveness, his courage in such cases invariably faltered in the face of the silent rebukes administered by personalities stronger than his own, and Wellington, who among those surrounding him was probably the least likely to indulge the royal huffs and pets, remained confident throughout that this time there would be very little nonsense.⁴ The obvious strategy

1 Lord Liverpool to Peel, 1 September 1822, Add. MSS. 40304, f.69.

2 Peel, 1.332-3.

3 Arbuthnot to Lord Sidmouth, 4 September /1822/, Sidmouth MSS.

4 Wellington and his Friends, pp.28-9.

was to reason the King into compliance but here unfortunately Lord Liverpool was likely to do more harm than good. A veritable bundle of nerves before his first audience at Carlton House, he spoke of giving George twenty-four hours to make his decision and luckily Arbuthnot was at hand to advise him to treat the visit as purely complimentary.¹ A second meeting a day afterwards only led to the expected tantrum. When told that Wellington, Bathurst and Westmorland were agreed on the necessity of having Canning in the Commons, the King immediately inquired whether they would press their opinion as far as resignation and this hint of immovability on his part was followed up by a demand for an alternative which if not forthcoming "the King takes for granted that Lord Liverpool and the other members of the Cabinet are prepared to break up the Government."² But the Prime Minister had proposed and others would now dispose. No sooner had he left the Closet than George, thinking to test the Cabinet's solidarity, sent out summons to Peel, Wellington, Sidmouth and Eldon, little guessing that he was doing Lord Liverpool the favour of conveniently anticipating his very next step. Of course, Sidmouth and Eldon, especially the latter who was already thick with the King,³ were certain to make a nuisance of themselves but the other two could be trusted implicitly to nip wrong impressions in the bud and put the government's views compellingly and clearly. So it turned out. Sidmouth unwittingly destroyed the basic premise of the King's position by refusing to admit that his personal wishes came of any account, and when he tried the political argument that Peel and Canning held irreconcilable differences on matters of principle Peel himself had probably contradicted him not half an hour earlier.

1 Arbuthnot, p.31.

2 Hobhouse, p.95; George IV, ii.535.

3 Wellington and his Friends, p.28.

The Lord Chancellor fared just as disastrously. He made no secret of his rooted dislike for the man of his colleagues' choice, even casting dark hints of his own inevitable retirement if such was allowed, but here again Peel's behaviour made a telling contrast for he had had every reason to advance his personal claims and yet had waived all in favour of the government's larger interest.¹ It was Wellington, however, who most trenchantly exposed the weakness of their ground. Himself confined to bed by a fever brought on by barbaric medical treatment, he kept in constant touch with developments though Arbuthnot on the government's side and Knighton on the King's, and here it must be said that in the care of the latter, who from being a royal physician had worked his way into a position of confidence and power as George's unofficial secretary, the Duke's advice more than likely lost nothing in the passing.² From the start George exhibited a willingness to be bullied into acquiescence by a mind more resolute than his. After Knighton's first visit to the bedchamber at Apsley House he was pleased to confess that Wellington's counsel "has produced a stronger conviction on my mind than anything that had been previously urged by others" and before the matter was settled he was to put Liverpool off twice in order to let the Duke have his say.³ Apart from urging the necessity on political grounds of Canning's

1 Hobhouse, pp.95-7.

2 See Knighton's comment that Eldon was an unfit adviser for the King "from exciting irritation" and his confidence to Arbuthnot that "we shall soon be right in all directions." Arbuthnot to Lord Liverpool, 7 September 1822, Add. MSS. 38290, ff.233-4.

3 Originally Lord Liverpool expected to receive the King's answer to his proposition on Thursday, 5 September. This was later changed to Saturday but in the end the King wrote a letter of concurrence on Sunday. Buckingham, George IV, 1.372; King to Lord Liverpool, 6 September 1822, Add. MSS. 38190, f.57.

return - the threat of an irresistible surge of reform and the retirement of the Prime Minister loomed over every stage of the negotiation - Wellington got to the heart of the difficulty by tackling head-on the delicate question of the King's private honour. Since the imagined insult had been Canning's refusal to accept the legal guilt of the late Queen, tendering his resignation instead, it was quite ridiculous for the King to expect any reparation or acknowledgment, but Wellington cleverly drew attention away from the wrong done to the act of honour which could forgive it. In this case, he argued, the essential distinction was between the situation of the King and that of a private individual. Where the latter could call another to account if he felt his honour impugned, the sovereign would only demean himself by seeking explanation from one necessarily his subject. Where others too had to demand satisfaction to save their good name he could use the royal magnanimity to enhance his royal character. "The honour of your Majesty," Wellington concluded, "consists in acts of mercy and grace, and I am convinced that your Majesty's honour is most safe in extending your grace and favour to Mr. Canning upon this occasion if the arrangement in contemplation is beneficial to your Majesty's service." This little discourse fully answered the most serious of George's scruples. Wellington followed it up with further advice through Knighton, and though Eldon at the last minute sought a redefinition of the government's Catholic policy and a joint leadership in the Commons the King henceforth was resigned to the inevitable.¹ On 8 September when the Lord Chancellor made his usual Sunday morning call at Carlton House he found the letter to Liverpool already written, a few hours later the Prime Minister waiting at Coombe Wood with "philosophical

1 Wellington Desp. (new series), 1.272-6; Arbuthnot to Lord Liverpool, [7 September 1822], Add. MSS. 38290, f.233.

patience" had it delivered into his hands and first thing the next morning Arbuthnot was on his way to Gloucester Lodge to inquire of Mrs. Canning after her husband's latest movements.¹

The royal note accepting the Cabinet's proposal - "the greatest sacrifice of my opinions and feelings that I have ever made in my life" said an accompanying letter - also included an express direction that Canning himself should peruse it, and this condition was the last of Liverpool's tribulations.² One paragraph in particular was likely to set Canning by the ears, though the Prime Minister for his part thought the whole "express'd with as much delicacy as considering the King's strong Personal Feelings could reasonably be expected."³ That paragraph described, as Wellington had taught George to describe it, the "brightest ornament" of the Crown to be "the power of extending grace and favour to a subject who may have incurred his displeasure," and obviously the temptation was for Canning to inquire in what respect he had so offended. Otherwise there was nothing to mar the government's offer. All along Canning had needed no persuading that for the sake of his family's happiness and his obligations as a public man, the opportunity of honourably succeeding to Londonderry's station would be improper to pass by, and as soon as the offer was made on his arrival from Birmingham with little hesitation but genuine reluctance he turned his back on India and made ready to re-enter the political roughhouse.⁴ As for the insinuation in

1 Wellington Desp. (new series), i.278-9; Arbuthnot, p.32; Arbuthnot to Canning, 9 September 1822, Canning MSS. It is interesting to note that the whole time Wellington, in his own words, was being "of some use in driving the Nail which we are at present hammering at" the Prime Minister was at his place in Surrey, a startling admission of his inability to manage the King.

2 Liverpool, iii.199-200.

3 Lord Liverpool to Peel, 8 September 1822, Add. MSS. 40304, f.70.

4 The best account of Canning's feelings based on an exhaustive survey of the unpublished material is to be found in

the King's letter, that was soon got over. On first reading it he did not conceal his annoyance and hinted outright that he would write a memorandum denying any disrespect for Lord Liverpool to read in the Closet. Liverpool with the help of Wellington and Arbuthnot tried to smooth things over by begging him to remember the political importance of his acceptance and assuring him that the King would forgive and forget, but it was not until he had taken a day for consideration, forcing the Prime Minister to postpone an appointment at Carlton House, that he contented himself with a formal observation to the effect "that if he were not restrained by his Majesty's declared wish from entering into details, he could make it clear that ... he had not the remotest intention of giving any offence"¹ Three days later at a ceremony which was remarkable for the absence of half the Cabinet and the King's slight awkwardness the seals of office were handed over.² The Prime Minister, indeed all of the "most efficient" ministers, must have heaved a sigh of relief that the administration's parliamentary strength was now little diminished.

Perhaps the greatest anxiety the government faced after the King had been reconciled to "the last calamity" was not so much whether its offer was good enough but whether Canning in the time-honoured fashion would stipulate men and measures.³ Certainly Eldon whispered in the King's ear that "Canning would get rid of all his old servants" and that George was inclined to believe him was apparent during an audience granted Arbuthnot when he insisted vehemently "over and over again ... that he would agree to no terms, and that Canning must not be attempting to

A. Aspinall, "Canning's Return to Office in September 1822," English Historical Review, lxxviii (1963). 531-45.

1 Bathurst, p.532; Liverpool, iii.201-2; Arbuthnot to Canning, /12 September 1822/, Canning MSS.

2 Buckingham, George IV, i.375; Canning to Lord Granville, 18 September 1822, PRO 30/29.

3 See Buckingham, George IV, i.372, 374.

bring in other persons."¹ Little did they know after "the single transaction" had been carried through that "the parvenu" with the full blessing of the Prime Minister would completely rebuild the government. In the brief haggle over his own coming in Canning made no stipulations except to say that he had particular interest for Huskisson and one Backhouse, a protégé of his at the Board of Control.² Nevertheless, Lord Liverpool must have known perfectly well that at least some weeding-out had soon to take place. Towards the end of the parliamentary session he himself had sounded Sidmouth on the subject of his brother-in-law's relinquishment of the Duchy of Lancaster and more than once, the last time indeed in August, he had assured a thoroughly dissatisfied Huskisson that his claim for higher office was the first among the junior ministers.³ Nor could it be overlooked that Canning having undertaken the good government of the House of Commons would as a matter of course pursue the changes which would most facilitate that arduous task. In fact the new minister made his presence felt straight away. Wallace was prepared to bet anything that in no time Canning would establish himself "not only as the Chief but the sole depository of L^{ord}/ L^{iverpool}/'s Confidence" and, sure enough, even before the formalities of appointment had been gone through he was badgering the Prime Minister with suggestions that the Speaker might remove to India, Williams-Wynn to the Speaker's Chair and Huskisson to the thereby vacant Board of Control.⁴ The trouble was that Canning believed sincerely that with Liverpool the desire to avoid giving offence had slow-

1 Hobhouse, p.96 n.2; Bathurst, p.532.

2 Arbuthnot, p.32.

3 Huskisson to Canning, 11 August 1822, Canning MSS; Hobhouse, p.99.

4 Wallace to Herries, 2 October 1822, Herries MSS; Canning to Lord Liverpool, 14 September 1822, Canning MSS.

ly come to mean that nothing was ever accomplished and a smart tug in the right direction would do both him and the government a world of service. "He will neither do - nor let do; /he once wrote/ is jealous of his authority - but afraid to use it himself; - ignorant of the world, but convinced (like our old Dean) that he knows more of it than anyone; - mysterious where he ought to be open; & liable to impressions from quarters against which he ought to be most on his guard; selfish - without absolute heartlessness indeed - but with such nervous intensity of desire to avoid anything that can give him pain - that I am quite sure, if one was to drop down in a fit, or be shot through the head while in his room, he would (if he could unobserved) sneak out of the room & get into his carriage, ringing perhaps for Willmot to take care of one!"¹ The Prime Minister's response to the latest scheming was pretty much in keeping with this character. On the one hand, he mildly encouraged Canning's hopes by letting him visit Dropmore to enlist Lord Grenville's support. On the other, he welcomed Wellington's intention to speak to Canning and warn him "against the danger of any attempts such as those meditated on former occasions."² Dead scared that too much would upset too many, at the outset he was only concerned to achieve the one point of Huskisson's admittedly deserved promotion. This in itself, however, was a blow struck for Canning, for the royal fiat had expressly extended to a man not a party. Wallace's prophecy that obedience in one thing would shortly become obedience in all seemed half fulfilled already.

The first and most essential step of Canning's project was to persuade Williams-Wynn into the Speaker's Chair, for the

1 Canning to Mrs. Canning, 24 August 1822, *ibid.*

2 Canning to Huskisson, 21 September 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, ff.213-14; Arbuthnot, p.32.

charge of an empire was not a little flattering to its present incumbent and the India Board had long been an object of Huskisson's. Some time previously Lord Liverpool had casually tested whether Williams-Wynn's ambitions were still parliamentary but the result had shown rather the reverse. On learning this, to keep two balls in play, Canning cajoled the Prime Minister into writing to Lord Melville to whom an "Oriental passion" was ascribed, at the same time arranging a visit to Dropmore to get Lord Grenville to bring pressure to bear on his nephew.¹ Both answers were known by Monday, 23 September. Melville's, probably due to his snug berth at the Admiralty, was a straight refusal, though as far as East India House was concerned the job would have been his for the asking. Grenville's came in the form of a letter to Williams-Wynn, which was entrusted to Canning and delivered at a morning meeting at the Foreign Office with Liverpool in attendance. Presumably it advised him to take a kind view of the proposal he was about to hear because Canning went from the conference by no means dissatisfied. However, Williams-Wynn did ask for time to ponder the matter. After sounding a few friends at East India House he knew Bengal was out of his reach but before taking the Chair he had to weigh carefully its expense and labour - "the prolonged debates of the present times under the auspices of Hume make the Speaker's Chair a question of strength of Constitution," his uncle warned² - against its honour and political convenience. The last consideration in fact turned out to be an empty dream and almost brought the negotiations to an immediate deadlock. For Williams-Wynn himself appointment to the Speakership was

1 Canning to Lord Liverpool, 14 September 1822, Lord Liverpool to Canning, 15 September 1822, Canning MSS; Canning to Lord Grenville, 20 September 1822, Grenville MSS; Lord Liverpool to Lord Melville, 16 September 1822, Canning to Huskisson, 21 September 1822, Add. MSS. 38411, f.96, 38743, ff.211-14.

2 Thomas Grenville to Williams-Wynn, 15 September 1822, Coed-y-maon MSS.

certainly no end of the political road; on important occasions Abbot had participated in debate, Addington was not the only one who had moved from Chair to Cabinet and a posture of neutrality at a time of party turmoil could be distinctly advantageous. But Buckingham it was who reminded him that he was a party man and that the Grenvilles still retained a separate identity though joined with the government. In a letter dated 25 September followed by another two days later he put the issue squarely as withdrawal of him and his friends from "official connexion" with the government or continued representation in the Cabinet, arguing with some fairness and as Lord Liverpool anticipated that such had been the terms of their original coalition. When informed of this ultimatum by Williams-Wynn, Canning was understandably furious. While he agreed that he should visit Coombe Wood to talk the matter over further, he also dashed off notes to the master of that house conveying a broad hint that if Huskisson was not advanced his own retirement was imminent. Indeed, Buckingham's awkwardness had brought him to the point where his larger plans could no longer be held back. Already in writing to the Prime Minister he allowed himself to say that Bragge-Bathurst's office should be kept safely away from Grenville hands, and at the first opportunity he resolved to find out whether Liverpool's liking for Vansittart had diminished sufficiently to enable the Exchequer to be opened for Robinson and the Board of Trade for Huskisson. Such a plan displayed an enviable cunning. Since the Grenvilles had long held that Vansittart constituted the government's most serious liability they could not easily stand in the way of his departure by holding on to an adequate inducement, and should they persist in being unco-operative means might still be found to reconcile "poor Van" to administering the affairs of Lancaster rather than India. The "arch-schemer" was fast proving his

capabilities.¹

Canning's opportunity to set in motion his master plan came almost at once. At his interview with Williams-Wynn the Prime Minister made little progress beyond a vague suggestion that Buckingham might be accommodated in the not too distant future,² and the day after, in commiserating with Canning over the apparent deadlock, the latter casually, subtly warped the conversation round. "L/Liverpool/ does not know of my writing to you," ran his report to Huskisson. "Nor had he the smallest notion of mentioning the matter to me, if I had not ... happened to inquire, hopelessly at the moment, whether he was as much wedded to Van & Van to his Seals as ever. The answer, to my infinite surprise, was 'O no! I could get him out, & would, if I saw my way to an arrangement that I was sure would satisfy all parties; but I could not get him out for H/Huskisson/ to succeed him, & the I/India/ Bd which is H's object would be the surest lure to Van.' This, not in words, but in substance, was L's way of opening the matter to me And then we went back to India & the Speaker &c as if all that had passed had been in parenthesis"³ Having learnt this much and that Huskisson would be content with the Board of Trade besides, Canning got ready to hound the Grenvilles mercilessly to a point of outright capitulation.⁴ Here though, he met with unexpected resistance,

1 For the negotiation thus far see Canning to Williams-Wynn, 22 September 1822, Canning to Lord Liverpool, 28, 29 September 1822, Canning MSS; Canning to Huskisson, 23 September 1822, Add. MSS; 38743, f.215; Buckingham, George IV, i.381-2, 385-7; Lord Grenville to Williams-Wynn, 24 September 1822, Williams-Wynn to Thomas Grenville, 26 September 1822, Duke of Buckingham to Williams-Wynn, 27 September 1822, Coed-y-maen MSS.

2 Duke of Buckingham to Williams-Wynn, 1 October 1822, *ibid*.

3 Canning to Huskisson, 3 October 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, ff.217-18.

4 Huskisson to Canning, 3 October 1822, Canning MSS; Canning to Lord Liverpool, 4 October 1822, Add. MSS. 38193, ff.164-5.

much to the timid Liverpool's consternation and his own scarcely veiled indignation. Probably through Williams-Wynn Buckingham had been invited to come up from the country to discuss his and his party's position, but instead of accepting, on the grounds that discussion would only settle his opinion even further, he produced a letter ostensibly to his cousin proposing the illogical and barely comprehensible course of so far assisting the interest of government by acceding to the general arrangement but withdrawing from all "official connexion" because his party's did not coincide. Though instructed to do so, Williams-Wynn did not dare show such nonsense to Canning or the Prime Minister. To explain Buckingham's non-appearance he merely said that the Duke preferred to convey his views through him. To give himself time to correct his folly he gave out that he was writing again to render those views a little more explicit, also adding to discourage false hopes that a successful termination was "highly improbable." Alas, his diplomacy availed nothing. No sooner had he pointed out the absurdities and inconsistencies of withdrawal, especially the invidiousness of leaving the government in the lurch nine months after receiving a political dukedom, than Buckingham wrote to Lord Liverpool saying all he should not have. As far as Williams-Wynn was concerned, this was the end of the matter. He had fully made up his mind, and more than once told Canning the same, "to consent to no change of my official situation which while apparently more advantageous to myself would loosen the ostensible & real connection of my friends," and being made to appear in open disagreement with his political chief, which seemed to make him the villain of the piece, was really the last straw.¹

1 Duke of Buckingham to Williams-Wynn, 2, 3, 4, October 1822, Williams-Wynn to the Duke of Buckingham, 3 October 1822, Coed-y-maen MSS; Williams-Wynn to Canning, 3, 5 October 1822, Williams-Wynn to Lord Liverpool, 5 October 1822, Canning MSS.

Even so, Canning refused to take no for an answer. Williams-Wynn had already remarked on "the manner in which Canning has assumed to himself, even in the presence of Lord Liverpool, the tone and authority of Premier,"¹ and interpreting the Prime Minister's passiveness as tacit approval Canning was little disposed to concede he was beaten. As he told Huskisson, when enjoining him not to breathe a word on matters pending: "I am perfectly confident of L's sincerity: & brought as he is now to a point, which I thought hopeless, it would be a thousand pities to raise any impediments in his way."² The day of the last attempt to talk the Grenvilles round happening to be a Friday, and it now being clear that the blood of cousins ran thicker than any venom for Vansittart, Canning spent the whole of the weekend feverishly searching for some last minute compromise. On the Saturday he consulted Reid, the Chairman of the East India Company, at his country home but little came to light that was not already known; with the government's backing Manners Sutton, the Speaker, could be virtually certain of the Company's favour but Williams-Wynn's selection was totally out of the question. On the Sunday he went on to Coombe Wood, and here at least a glimmer of hope emerged. Talking over the stalemate that had been reached, the Prime Minister, probably thinking aloud, mentioned none too enthusiastically the possibility of Buckingham having a Cabinet seat without office, and Canning, desperate for any way out, even one hardly creditable, eventually persuaded him to try the King and abide by his decision. With Williams-Wynn not in the running for the Governor Generalship, it was absolutely the last chance to open the India Board for Huskisson. In the event the King may well have smelt a rat. Though Liverpool's letter said nothing of Huskisson,

1 Buckingham, George IV, i.385.

2 Canning to Huskisson, 4 October 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, f.228.

putting the issue rather as a struggle to secure a suitable candidate for India, the King, who was near at hand at Windsor, deigned no reply for a day and a half, and when his answer did come it rejected Buckingham's claim in no uncertain terms and alluded to the India Board as only a temporary Cabinet office while about it.¹ After this, short of what Canning called an "act of violence," nothing further could be done except to give Bragge-Bathurst a prod and move Vansittart and Robinson so room could be made for Huskisson at the Board of Trade. But Canning's gusto did not take long to return. On 9 October, a day after the King had spoken the final word, he confessed to being utterly down at heart, "unless," he added, "I were to resume my abdicated Empire & embark in the Jupiter after all."² A fortnight later to the day he was telling Huskisson of a forthcoming visit to Walmer when he intended "to put in motion ... the other series of machinery by which the Object, of which we have failed through India, is to be achieved."³

Concerning the more ambitious alternative, both Liverpool and Canning rated their chances fairly high. Of course, to the Prime Minister's way of thinking the aim of any reshuffle had to be the greatest happiness of the greatest possible number but in this case much of the personal embarrassment was taken away because those concerned had already made known their pretensions. After hearing Bragge-Bathurst's incessant complaints of overwork and ill-health, for instance, Liverpool could not help assuming that a hint of honourable retirement would suffice to open his office.⁴ Vansittart too, in giving out that he

1 Canning to Huskisson, 9 October 1822, *ibid.*, ff.235-9; Liverpool, 111.204-7.

2 Canning to Huskisson, 9 October 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, f.237.

3 Canning to Huskisson, 23 October 1822, *ibid.*, ff.250-1.

4 Huskisson to Canning, 11 August 1822, *ibid.*, ff.192-3.

would go at the end of the parliament, seemed ready for a change, especially when it was remembered that he had offered to relinquish the Exchequer for the India Board in 1820,¹ and Robinson had made it plain that his claims had to be taken into account in a letter written after Londonderry's death in which he had argued that after Canning he was next in line for promotion.² Indeed, it was ironical that Huskisson, for whose benefit the new arrangement was principally intended, promised to be the most difficult party. Already he had it laid down that if the Board of Control were to elude him on no account would he take the slightly inferior Board of Trade without Cabinet,³ and yet inasmuch as the King in Buckingham's case had been led to remark that the number of ministers had "become far too numerous" to try and force this condition was to run the risk of further trouble at Carlton House, trouble bound to be accentuated by the fact that a crony of Canning's was the party involved. Worse still, the matter might not end here. If the King cried out that he was being bullied into compliance the plan to reshape the government could fail completely. Vansittart, as the Prime Minister reminded Canning, and he might have added Bragge-Bathurst's name as well, must never suspect an approach to him as "at any one's instigation or as matter of compact,"⁴ but should the point be pursued too strongly what could stop him from thinking that a deeper game was afoot than his own convenient retirement? At all costs, the appearance of an intrigue with Canning its master mind had to be avoided. In fact, Liverpool needed no prompting to see that the only chance of success lay in letting Londonderry's ghost preside. He had

1 See supra, p.312; Vansittart to Lord Liverpool, 14 December 1822, Add. MSS. 38291, f.206.

2 Lord Liverpool to Vansittart, 16 December 1822, *ibid.*, 31232, f.297.

3 Huskisson to Canning, 3 October 1822, Canning MSS.

4 Canning to Huskisson, 4 October 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, f.228.

been favourable towards Huskisson's pretensions and Robinson, as Canning remarked, had been his favourite child in the Commons, and by now pretending that the changes were a last act of respect to the dear departed more likely than not Canning's enemies would see no alternative to keeping their worst thoughts to themselves. Only Huskisson with his demand for a Cabinet seat stood in the way it seemed.

Proceedings commenced during the last week of October. On the Tuesday just before going to Walmer Canning wrote to Liverpool suggesting that the time was ripe to knock on Bragge-Bathurst's and Vansittart's door,¹ and not twenty-four hours elapsed before the Prime Minister, presumably in response to this advice, addressed himself to Lord Sidmouth who on the score of family and old friendship was personally interested. Of course, the first pass had to be made at Bragge-Bathurst to ascertain whether a vacancy could in fact be created, but while Liverpool confined himself to this much initially what inducements he held out, if any, can only be guessed at. Whatever he said it made no impression on Sidmouth. "I wrote to sound Sidmouth about his friend," he told Arbuthnot despairingly, "but I should say that by his answer he appeared more tenacious of office & situation for himself & friend than he was before."² After this discouraging start not a word more was heard on the subject until he returned to Coombe Wood in the middle of November. However, that he was determined to see the matter through - the hopelessness of post-bag negotiation no doubt explained the fortnight's silence - became obvious when Sidmouth made the short ride over from Richmond Park the day of his arrival. Then and there the Prime Minister put the reasons behind his request; Bragge-Bathurst's ailing health which with the in-

1 Canning to Lord Liverpool, /29 October 1822/, Canning MSS.

2 Arbuthnot, p.35.

creasing demands of parliament on ministers brooked most serious consideration, the importance of promoting Huskisson to gratify Canning and evade the nuisance of more than one re-election at prestigious Liverpool, and a commonplace reminder that enough could happen in six months or a year to render a later vacancy more a curse than a blessing. All this neatly topped with a cordial assurance that whenever Bragge-Bathurst should choose to leave "such an arrangement as to our Friend's Family as may appear to you & to him to be just & equitable" would follow immediately.¹ Fortunately, Sidmouth did all that was desired of him. For a few days, which must have seemed an eternity to Liverpool and Canning, he pondered the matter carefully, but once his mind had become reconciled to the complete extinction of the former Addington glory he lost no time in conveying to his brother-in-law the Prime Minister's offer of comfortable and honourable retirement. Nor was Bragge-Bathurst any less co-operative. Indeed, he was positively helpful, for in placing Harwich, his parliamentary seat, at the government's disposal he provided Canning with perhaps the last of the Treasury boroughs and means for Huskisson to take over Liverpool simultaneously. The only favour he did ask, a small enough one, was that the pension promised to his wife should be inheritable by his daughters whether or not he survived her, and it was in fact the negotiation over the legal intricacies which alone precluded a final settlement until a week before Christmas. By then the Prime Minister had already sought out Vansittart.²

1 Lord Liverpool to /Lord Sidmouth/, 21 November 1822, Add. MSS. 38291, ff.174-8.

2 Lord Sidmouth to Bragge-Bathurst, 27 November, 1, 5, 17, December 1822, Bragge-Bathurst to Lord Sidmouth, 28 November 1822, Sidmouth MSS; Lord Sidmouth to Lord Liverpool, 17 December 1822, Add. MSS. 38291, f.218; Hobhouse, pp.99-100. It is another indication of Liverpool's state of mind that he was ready to see Bragge-Bathurst himself if Sidmouth refused to intercede. Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.196-7.

In most respects the case of "poor Van" was much more delicate than Bragge-Bathurst's. As the figure who through no fault of his own, unless it were his peculiar fumbling oratory, had become publicly identified with the government's financial embarrassments and an object of ridicule even to his colleagues, the terms of his discharge from the Exchequer had to be particularly well thought out to be anything not dishonourable. In this connection his replacement by Robinson was unexceptionable, a much happier choice than say Huskisson, who besides being Canning's right hand man had sat in the "economic cabinet" which would have at once smacked of supersession by command of the Prime Minister. Nonetheless, Lord Liverpool's offer of the Duchy of Lancaster did contain one serious snag. Though as an office it was a lucrative post of honour and though its holder was customarily entitled to a seat in the Cabinet, what filled Vansittart with dismay was the uncomfortable prospect of being left an elder statesman in the House of Commons when from a position of influence he would be reduced to silence on the floor and hack-work above stairs. To all appearances he was immediately conscious of the slight. In reply to Liverpool's letter, which included the usual patter about the appropriateness of the changes,¹ he remarked that his inclination was rather for "a total retreat," and since the Prime Minister had invited him to consult Lord Sidmouth on a matter so personal he excused himself from returning a definite answer until he had seen him.² Canning guessed at once that he was after a peerage and sympathised,³ but to Liverpool such a request was almost an impropriety. Always chary of giving away peerages after Pitt's

1 Liverpool, 111.208-10.

2 Vansittart to Lord Liverpool, 14 December 1822, Add. MSS. 38291, ff.205-6.

3 Canning to Lord Liverpool, 14 December 1822, Canning MSS.

lavish regime, he had tried to make it a rule that any recipient should have the wealth and position to support the title bestowed, and Vansittart's qualifications were badly lacking in each respect. Still, for the moment he was spared the embarrassment of haggling the matter. Having come to the conclusion that the offer was "not less honourable than a simple retirement" and its timing "at least not discreditable," Vansittart first wanted to make certain that Robinson and no other would be his successor, and to this end he bombarded Liverpool with advice about how best to approach him.¹ Most of what he said showed that he knew his man. Understandably perhaps, the ambition in Robinson's soul, reckoned as he was the most promising among the younger blood, was diluted by the strain of having a reputation to live up to, and Vansittart's suggestion that Peel, with whom Robinson was staying, should intercede to avoid any nerves was in the circumstances eminently sensible. Not that the precaution really proved necessary. The Prime Minister confided the proposed arrangements "which our poor Friend Londonderry had very much at heart" to Peel and his house guest on 18 December, and in view of his wish "that no nervousness nor apprehension of his own supposed Deficiency will deter him" it must have been a pleasant surprise when Robinson wrote back accepting with alacrity the day after.² With this much settled, Vansittart's one and only concern was to rescue his dignity by getting out of the Commons. When Liverpool communicated the good news of Robinson's acceptance he replied that his own course was still undecided, while to Sidmouth he complained that continuing in office was an uncertain sort of pension with

1 Vansittart to Lord Liverpool, 16 December 1822, Add. MSS. 38291, ff.211-17.

2 Lord Liverpool to Peel, 18 December 1822, Lord Liverpool to Robinson, 18 December 1822, Robinson to Lord Liverpool, 19 December 1822, *ibid.*, ff.219-24.

the added disadvantage that "any minister in the H of C who would not be utterly insignificant is in a situation very unfavourable to health & comfort."¹ A meeting between Liverpool and himself having been arranged for Boxing Day, he at length decided to give a hint of his intentions by speaking to Arbuthnot, often a useful go-between. Nor did he whisper in the wrong ear. "I think I have discovered what the wish is of Vansittart's mind," wrote his confidant. "He is anxious to quit the House of Commons altogether; & it would I think delight him if you were to propose to him a Peerage with the Duchy of Lancaster for immediate Possession I did not like to bring him to a precise point, lest I shd seem to fortify his own notions ... but he seemed to me to speak explicitly enough when he repeatedly said that were he a Peer he shd not hesitate about the Duchy"² Who broached the subject on 26 December or whether Sidmouth did it on Vansittart's behalf remains obscure, but certainly both parties came away with the terms finally settled, "Van" highly elated with the promise of a peerage and Liverpool consoled only by the thought that without remainder to his nephews it would shortly become extinct.³ To make the jigsaw complete there was just Huskisson now to accommodate.

In dealing with Huskisson the greatest difficulty was his ungracious temperament. Soured by nine years' possession of a near sinecure, the result of too close an attachment to Canning in 1812, he was beginning to act as if every man's hand was against him, completely forgetting that in the cruel world of politics what others thought of him was vastly more important than what he thought of himself. One outburst in a letter to

1 Vansittart to Lord Liverpool, 21 December 1822, *ibid.*, ff.225-6; Vansittart to Lord Sidmouth, 22 December 1822, Sidmouth MSS.

2 Arbuthnot to Lord Liverpool, 23 December 1822, Add. MSS. 38291, ff.237-40.

3 Vansittart to Lord Sidmouth, 26 December 1822/, Sidmouth MSS.

Canning showed how agonising his introspection had become: "My own impression is ... that L/iverpool/1 has some fanciful theory of his own about dividing public men into two classes - those who are, from the outset, destined to be drudges - and those who are marked for Cabinet: -- and that long ago He has thrown me into the former Class. I believe also that He is backed in this by some Peers in the Cabinet; who think that /that/part of the Govt which belongs to the H of C ought all to be Drudges, subject to their management in their own way."¹ It must be said straight away that neither Canning nor anyone else gave the least encouragement to this mood of self-pity and gloomy rumination, Canning himself calling it, though not to Huskisson's face, out and out "perverseness."² If Huskisson thought he was safeguarding his honour in claiming a seat in the Cabinet, he was alone in that belief. From the start Canning warned that rank obstruction would be taken amiss not only by his superiors but the world in general, and for the sake of harmony between Liverpool and the King and between Liverpool and his colleagues he begged him to be content with the Cabinet in reversion rather than play the part of spoiler-in-chief.³ Though there was little in the claim that the President of the Board of Trade necessarily sat in the Cabinet - Robinson's predecessor never did - always the argument came back to the realities of Huskisson's position. Charles Ellis, a mutual friend of Canning, showed him exactly where he stood: "... the real practical question now is ... whether it would be wise on your part - by insisting on the whole succession - failing of success, either to defeat altogether an arrangement for many reasons so desirable,

1 Huskisson to Canning, 25 October 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, f.259.

2 Canning to Lord Liverpool, 28 December 1822, Canning MSS.

3 Canning to Huskisson, 3, 23 October 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, ff.219-20, 251.

or to allow it to take place, another person being placed over your head at the Bd of Trade; or succeeding, to force yourself on the K/ing/ & a reluctant & ill disposed Cabt? or whether it is not better Policy, to accept the situation offered to you with perfectly good will on all sides, with the reversion of Cabt on the first vacancy, and the certainty of such Vacancy at the latest by Van's retirement at the end of the Parliam~~en~~/t."¹

In the end it took the combined efforts of Wellington and Canning and a fortnight of comings and goings to bring him to his senses. The other stages of the arrangement being virtually complete, Canning gave him a thorough talking-to on Christmas Day without any visible effect, and Wellington, who seemed to pride himself on his usefulness on such occasions, was no more successful the day following.² Since Huskisson had made his position clear weeks before, this much was all that could be expected.³ Even so, the holdup made everyone's tempers run short. Liverpool could not "conceive anything in/ worse taste than a man endeavouring to force himself into a Cabinet," Canning remonstrated afresh by letter and Huskisson left Town in a huff for Petworth casting dark hints that such ungenerous treatment might easily end in his retirement.⁴ A way out of the impasse was soon being sought though. While Wellington dashed off to Brighton to report on "the King's state of mind and general disposition to the Govt" beofre the whole

1 Charles Ellis to Huskisson, 23 December 1822, *ibid.*, ff.280-1.

2 Duke of Wellington to Canning, 26 December 1822, Canning MSS; *Arbuthnot*, p.35; Huskisson to Arbuthnot, 26 December 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, f.285.

3 Wellington's charge that Canning had kept Liverpool deliberately in the dark about Huskisson's Cabinet pretensions is completely unfounded. *Mrs. Arbuthnot*, i.200. The Prime Minister was showing an interest in Huskisson's state of mind throughout the negotiations. See Arbuthnot to Huskisson, 2 December /1822/, Arbuthnot to Lord Liverpool, 16 December /1822/, Add. MSS. 38743, ff.265-7, 38291, ff.209-10.

4 *Arbuthnot*, p.37; Huskisson to Arbuthnot, 26 December 1822, Canning to Huskisson, 27 December 1822, Huskisson to Charles

arrangement was submitted, Canning knocked up Williams-Wynn in a valiant endeavour to charm him from the India Board to the Board of Trade with its house and a thousand a year less. Unfortunately neither excursion achieved its purpose. Williams-Wynn professed himself happily ensconced where he was and with mighty conceit told Buckingham that only the Admiralty or one of the Secretaryships of State would be good enough to tempt him; and Wellington arriving at Brighton found Knighton not there which meant as he explained to Mrs. Arbuthnot that the King would decide nothing and "fret and fume" in the meantime.¹ In deference to the Duke's advice Liverpool did agree to wait "the Accoucheur's" return, but he had already made up his mind to leave Huskisson to "his M/ajest/y's unfetter'd decision" so that a few days' delay made very little difference.² His thinking was to coerce the recalcitrant by placing him where to persist he would have to defy the King's wishes openly, for after what had gone before that George would take exception to an arrangement which left the number in the Cabinet no smaller almost went without saying. "Entre nous," he told Arbuthnot, "my hope is that the King will object to it, saying that he will not oppose Huskisson coming into the Cabinet hereafter when the numbers are reduced."³ Luckily the King responded pretty much as he hoped he would. Though George gave his Prime Minister full discretion to do what he considered best "for the good of the public service," he also said in passing that he was quite right in deploring the Cabinet's present unwieldy size, and this covert suggestion was enough for Canning to dash off a final fervent appeal.⁴ As he explained to the errant Huskisson,

Ellis, 29 December 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, ff.286, 287-8, 294-5.

1 Canning to Lord Liverpool, 28, 30 December 1822, Canning MSS; Buckingham, George IV, 1.406; Wellington and his Friends, p.36.

2 Arbuthnot, pp.35-6.

3 Ibid., p.37.

4 Liverpool, 111.210-11; Arbuthnot, pp.37-8.

after pointing out that his name had been submitted as he had demanded: "I do think that, the point of honour thus completely satisfied, you would do what is right towards the King, what is just & kind towards Liverpool, and what is, beyond all question most expedient for your own comfort, and ultimately (and at no distance of time) for your own reputation, by yourself proposing to wave the pressing this point upon the King, at the present moment. I am sure it would be politick so far as the King is concerned. I am sure it would set all right with Liverpool - whose agitation has, in some stages of this business amounted almost to illness, and to whom every successive stage has been an effort such as when I came into the Government I thought it utterly hopeless that he should find nerves to undertake Do not suppose that I wish your sacrifice to be either for a long or much less for an indefinite time. I pledge myself that you will succeed to the first vacancy that happens in the Cabinet: and failing a vacancy, I pledge myself that you shall be called to the Cabinet in the interval between this & the next Session of Parliament."¹ Rather ungraciously, but acknowledging that a year's abeyance of his claim did not constitute a personal disparagement or mitigate from his argument that the Board of Trade should be a Cabinet office, to these terms Huskisson acceded, and the point to which Liverpool and Canning had most devoted themselves was gained at long last.² Except for a brief flurry when Wallace threw up his place at the Board of Trade in disgust, disrupting plans for the disposal of the minor offices, the jigsaw was now complete.

Without doubt the changes beginning with Canning's elevation and "Brother Bragge's" dispossession represent a

1 Canning to Huskisson, 3 January 1823, Add. MSS. 38744, ff.2-4.

2 Huskisson to Canning, 5 January 1823, Canning MSS; Canning to Huskisson, 6 January 1823, Add. MSS. 38744, f.9; Liverpool, 111.212.

turning point for the administration as a whole. It was not that they ushered in an era of what has been ambiguously called "liberal toryism," for an "improving" policy had increasingly recommended itself to the government from as early as 1819. It was not even that the "liberal" impetus seemed to quicken in consequence; had Wallace continued at the Board of Trade in all probability his achievement would have been as great as Huskisson's, and Peel, of course, was in the midst of preparing his great programme of domestic reforms. Rather than measures, the emphasis must be on men. Two features were apparent before Parliament even reconvened and almost from the moment that Canning succeeded Lord Londonderry. The first was that henceforth the government would be both stronger and more assertive in the House of Commons, though it is strange to reflect that Huskisson's exclusion left the number of Commons' men in the Cabinet the lowest since 1816. Gone were the days of Londonderry's lackadaisical regime when the administration had largely lived from week to week in parliament and when the country gentlemen had been governed by amiability rather than organisation. At the beginning of October Lord Liverpool and Canning decided to hold a week of Cabinets the following month to consider what promised to be the outstanding issues of the session to come; in December they asked the revenue departments and the Home Office for lists of bills they proposed to sponsor; and a fortnight before parliament reassembled Canning produced a memorandum setting forth the government's "Engagements or quasi Engagements ... in order that the Cabinet may determine on the course to be pursued ... & that we may not have to decide upon it on the spur of a call from the opposition, but be prepared to announce it spontaneously."¹ Always the inference was there that London-

1 Ibid., pp.213-14; Arbuthnot to Peel, 27 December 1822, Add. MSS. 40340, ff.10-12; Canning to Lord Liverpool, 22 January 1823, Canning MSS.

derry had been far too haphazard for the Commons' good government. "There is no advantage in avoiding discussion amongst ourselves upon disagreeable subjects, to be taken unprepared when those subjects are forced upon us in Parlt," observed Canning. "We all must be sensible of the great disadvantage which accrues from postponing the consideration of subjects which are likely to be brought forward in Parliament to the time of its actual sitting, or even to a short period antecedent to it," echoed the Prime Minister.¹ A new dynamism had seized the government, not the dynamism provided by an "improving" spirit or search for greater efficiency for that was already in operation, but the dynamism resulting from more energetic and ebullient leadership; and it is mainly in these terms that the later history of Liverpool's administration ought to be written. In most respects the issues continued the same -- the clamour for economy was as insistent as ever, with the Catholic question still open the Irish problem remained largely administrative, and the struggle went on for a corn law fair to all. In these last years it was not what was done or what was argued but how that makes the reconstruction of 1822 so remarkable. If the one has been neglected at the expense of the other it is surely because the government seemed favoured by the opposition's demoralisation and an economic situation which took much of the sting out of public complaint. Yet the fact remains that the administration was never stronger in parliament than it was after 1823. Hobhouse commenting on Canning's first session as leader said that he had "taken less part in debate than any leader for many years,"² and with Peel, Huskisson and a newly conscientious Robinson as his chief lieutenants it was hardly surprising. By getting rid of the mediocrities who had ever surrounded poor

1 Ibid; Liverpool, 111.213-14.

2 Hobhouse, p.102.

Londonderry the balance of authority and talent between government and opposition was suddenly put right.

Essentially it was Canning who made all the difference, and here one is brought to the second feature which distinguished the period to 1827. Even if it can be argued that Canning's qualities as a parliamentary leader were never tested like Londonderry's, the sheer personality of the man made its own decisive impact inside and outside the Cabinet. One of his subordinates described him as "perpetually doing & undoing" in contrast to Londonderry's habit of doing "as little as possible consistent with the proper execution of the business of office,"¹ and it was this unlimited energy never confined to his own department which aroused his colleagues' ire almost immediately.² Indeed, instead of dividing the Cabinet between "liberal Tories" and "ultra-Tories" it is probably much more meaningful to speak of those for Canning and those against him, for when the administration was brought to an end it was over men rather than measures that new allegiances were determined. Certainly the lines began to be drawn as soon as Canning became the driving force behind a comprehensive reconstruction of the government. Always inclined to be too clever by half when plain dealing was wanted, he never looked like shaking off the reputation for shiftiness and sly cunning fixed on him in 1809, and on this occasion it was the same old story of having his motives misconstrued and being abused right and left. Wellington complained of "a trick played upon us all" in claiming that Lord Liverpool had been kept deliberately in the dark about Huskisson's Cabinet pretensions, Eldon was furious that all had been done behind his back and the New Year had hardly begun before

1 Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.209.

2 In January 1823, for example, he was advocating a plan to relieve the landed interest by authorising advances from the sinking fund for the repayment of mortgages. Duke of Portland to Canning, 18 January 1823, Canning to Lord Liverpool, 21 January 1823, Canning MSS. This would have been completely outside Londonderry's province.

Bathurst was convincing himself that "there is some secret understanding with Holland House."¹ The hostility towards Canning, then, was not so much a conscientious difference of opinion - he disliked Liverpool's sinking fund policy as much as Wellington disliked his "foreign politicks" - as an immutable state of mind. Canning was a charlatan, all good men ought to be on their guard and that was that. But hence the importance of Liverpool. Though his part in Vansittart's demotion and the ousting of "Brother Bragge" seemed to make him Canning's willing instrument, he became more indispensable than ever in a Cabinet suddenly become argumentative. Canning on his side trusted him implicitly; in fact a partnership to last was well and truly established during his first few months in office. As he told Huskisson: "I will not deny myself the opportunity of saying that I am quite satisfied with L's conduct; that he has worked honestly, perseveringly & sincerely; that each step has been gained separately, with great dexterity, & (what was essential) without alarm; that each party necessarily has made the sacrifice exacted of him or taken the offer proposed to him as of his own free will ... & that finally I am perfectly confident that with less management or with more brusquerie the thing would not have been done."² Naturally enough, this finesse, this blameless behaviour also served to mollify those who would hear nothing good of Canning; but at the same time, because distrust of "the parvenu" was so deep-rooted, the notion that the Prime Minister was his humble obedient servant was never really dispelled. Indeed, the more his activities went unchallenged, the more dominant his position became, the stronger the feeling that Liverpool was grooming him to be his successor,

1 Wellington and his Friends, p.36; Mrs. Arbuthnot, i.200; Eldon, ii.468; Arbuthnot, p.42.

2 Canning to Huskisson, 21 December 1822, Add. MSS. 38743, f.277.

and with that prospect hanging over everyone's head to stave off the evil hour of political crisis and, if Wellington is to be believed, Radical triumph became a foremost responsibility. Canning, therefore, had dire need of the Prime Minister but to Wellington, Bathurst and company so did the country. More than ever Disraeli's "arch-mediocrity" looked irreplaceable.

CONCLUSION

The commonplace interpretation of British politics between Waterloo and Canning's return to power is that of a reactionary government under increasing pressure from outside opinion suddenly making good by bringing in men of more liberal inclination. Among historians it was the Victorians who indubitably established the fashion. To Harriet Martineau writing in the 1840's "the government had no love from any class - very little respect; intense hate from many - slavish fear from more" and Castlereagh's suicide came "as a ray of hope in the midst of thickest darkness."¹ To Spencer Walpole Eldon was "the genius which withstood all reform," "Londonderry regarded a Radical with the feelings with which a Francis or an Alexander regarded a Carbonaro" and "Englishmen enjoyed less real liberty than at any time since the Revolution of 1688" until "the Tory party, under new guidance ... deserted its old colours" and for "the first time in its history ... had the courage to pass over to the popular cause."² In fact, Liverpool's administration was neither reactionary nor suddenly liberal in 1822. What have been called "the arbitrary measures" of 1817 and 1819 were applied almost apologetically with a deliberate regard for traditional liberties, and the beginnings of the "improving" policy said to distinguish the government's later years can be traced back to the time when Huskisson's preoccupation was finance, Canning was keeping obscure and Peel was a private member. Indeed, coercion, if that is not too harsh a word, was a temporary and reform a permanent response to one and the same

1 Harriet Martineau, A History of the Thirty Years' Peace, 1816-1846, 1.88, 385.

2 Sir Spencer Walpole, A History of England from the Conclusion of the Great War in 1815, 1. v, 295, 11.127, 147.

situation. The outcry against the property tax, though no contemporary had ever seen the like, was looked upon as yet another "clamour" in a succession stretching from the Middlesex election and Wyvill's reform movement to Brougham's campaign against the Orders-in-Council, but with Spa Fields, the March of the Blanketeers, Peterloo and the Queen's trial the realisation gradually dawned on the government that lower class opinion was capable of being organised and capable of exerting a more or less permanent influence. As Peel was led to remark: "... public opinion never had such influence, and yet never was so dissatisfied with the share which it possessed. It is growing too large for the channels that it has been accustomed to run through ... the engineers that made them never dreamt of various streams that are now struggling for a vent."¹ Undoubtedly the crucial year was 1819. The recent general election in which the government suffered serious setbacks in the popular constituencies coupled with the unruliness of the new House of Commons made the connection between public opinion and parliament clearly perceptible. On the part of the country gentlemen there was no desire to overthrow the ministers, nor could there be until the administration appeared intransigently opposed to the wishes of the country; but their readiness to go along with the popular obsession for economy when wheat returned 70s. or over from May 1816 to May 1819 showed the extent of their susceptibility. By 1819 the need to take a positive approach to the problem of distress was overwhelming. To talk of prosperity as a providential occurrence, to insist that the government was powerless to affect the situation one way or the other was to alienate the affections of respectable opinion as much as public opinion proper. The immediate post-war recession had been

1 Croker, i.170.

patiently borne as a natural consequence of the mightiest struggle in the country's history. After recovery in 1817-18 yet another relapse made quiescence unforgivable.

However compulsive the need to reform, the ministers soon found that a vast gap existed between intention and performance, and it is largely a period of honest toil and little thanks which preceded the spectacular achievements of the 'later liberal phase.' In the beginning there were two serious distractions - the alarm following Peterloo and the Queen's trial, immediately afterwards another with the prolonged embarrassment of agriculture, and throughout all a constant clamour on the subjects of parliamentary and economical reform between which there existed in the public mind an inseparable and demonstrable connection. Each and every issue represented a dissipation of the government's energy and the occupation of parliament's valuable time, and the wonder must be not what was not achieved in the period before 1823 but rather what was. Of course, it was true that the deeper the public growl the greater the incentive to be doing something. The irony of the situation which Liverpool's administration faced was that its improving seemed to be commensurate with its growing unpopularity; a brave decision to return to the gold standard was promptly labelled a major cause of distress, relentless economising seemed only to whet the public's appetite for further sacrifices, every step towards freer trade made implacable enemies, and the search for a humane system of punishment invariably gave the Whigs the lion's share of attention. By 1822 in fact the government's parliamentary position was worse than it had ever been, worse because there were the first appearances of a formed opposition among the country gentlemen and a perceptible swing in favour of reform which made the Whigs a serious alternative. Only this steadily deteriorating authority sufficiently explains the reconstruction

of the government after 1820. Canning's return to office in 1816 had eliminated the immediate danger of a third party, entente with the Grenvilles left the Whigs altogether out in the cold, but once Canning departed and pressure mounted in the Commons the necessities of the situation demanded forthwith a more comprehensive and virile-looking administration. Hence formal alliance with the Grenvilles and persistent attempts to neutralise or repossess Canning, hence also the bringing forward of younger men like Peel and Robinson and the lopping off of much dead wood in the process. Behind the sentimental reunion of Pitt's old party lay the hard facts of political survival, and without question it is here that Liverpool's claim to greatness lies. For he was the sort of premier - sensible, realistic - which the rapidly changing times demanded. More than ever, with the Crown only casually interfering and public opinion perpetually, the centre of political gravity was located in the Commons, particularly in the person of Canning; and it was Liverpool's pragmatism and an old Christ Church friendship which above all steadied the government. Where Wellington later on let his seat in the Lords be conducive to remoteness, Liverpool was ever in touch, and Wellington's difficulties alone are a measure of his achievement. To move with the times, to forget the unreasoning antipathy to all change induced by the French Revolution was the lesson taught the government in the austere and unruly years which were the war's main legacy. In the circumstances of an insubordinate parliament and an overworked administration Liverpool managed the exercise to near-perfection.

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